



VE-'ED YA'ALEH (GEN 2:6)

ESSAYS IN BIBLICAL AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN
STUDIES PRESENTED TO EDWARD L. GREENSTEIN

VOLUME 2

EDITED BY

PETER MACHINIST, ROBERT A. HARRIS,
JOSHUA A. BERMAN, NILI SAMET, AND NOGA AYALI-DARSHAN



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Volume 2

WRITINGS FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD
SUPPLEMENT SERIES

Number 6



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Peter Machinist, Robert A. Harris,
Joshua A. Berman, Nili Samet, and Noga Ayali-Darshan





Atlanta

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These volumes are dedicated
In loving memory of Ed's parents
Samuel and Goldie Greenstein ז"ל

Paula Gribetz Gottlieb and Michael Gottlieb
Ira and Roberta Greenstein
Seth Greenstein and Carolyn Eichberg
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Rachelle and Alan Laytner
Victor and Karen Weisberg

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Abbreviations

Primary Sources

1QIsa ^a	Isaiah ^a
A.J.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
Anab.	Arrian, <i>Anabasis</i>
Avod. Zar.	Avodah Zarah
Avot R. Nat.	Avot de Rabbi Nathan
b.	Babylonian Talmud
B. Bat.	Bava Batra
B. Metz.	Bava Metzi'a
Ber.	Berakhot
C. Ap.	Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i>
Cant. Rab.	Canticles Rabbah
Doctr. chr.	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>
Eruv.	Eruvin
Esth. Rab.	Esther Rabbah
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Git.	Gittin
Hag.	Hagigah
Hist.	Herodotus, <i>Historiae</i>
Hul.	Hulin
Ker.	Keritot
Ket.	Ketubbot
LAB	Liber antiquitatum biblicarum
Lam. Rab.	Lamentations Rabbah
Lev. Rab.	Leviticus Rabbah
m.	Mishnah
Ma'as.	Ma'aserot
Meg.	Megillah
Mek.	Mekilta

Men.	Menahot
Midr. Lam.	Midrash Lamentations
Mo'ed Qat.	Mo'ed Qatan
Nid.	Niddah
Pesah.	Pesahim
Pesiq. Rab Kah.	Pesiqta de Rab Kahana
Pirqe R. El.	Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer
Qidd.	Qiddushin
Rab.	Rabbah
Rosh Hash.	Rosh Hashanah
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
Shabb.	Shabbat
Shev.	Shevi'it
Sop.	Soperim
t.	Tosefta
Ta'an.	Ta'anit
Tanh.	Tanhuma
Ter.	Terumot
Tg. Onq.	Targum Onqelos
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
Yad.	Yadayim
Yebam.	Yebamot

Secondary Sources and General

2	second-person
3	third-person
AASF	<i>Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae</i>
AASOR	<i>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AEI	Lichtheim, Miriam. <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i> . 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971–1980.
AH	<i>anno Hegirae</i> (in the year of [Muhammad's] Hegira [622 CE])
AHw	Soden, Wolfram von. <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981.

AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJBI	<i>Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute</i>
AKM	Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syren-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
ANEP	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
ANET	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament s
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AS	Assyriological Studies
AS	<i>Aramaic Studies</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AuOrS	Aula Orientalis-Supplementa
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BaghM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements
BBS	King, L. W. <i>Babylonian Boundary-Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum</i> . London: The British Museum, 1912.
BBVOT	Berliner Beiträge zum vorderen Orient, Texte
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovanien-sium

BHH	Reicke, Bo, and Leonhard Rost, eds. <i>Biblisch-historisches Handwörterbuch: Landeskunde, Geschichte, Religion, Kultur</i> . 4 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962–1966.
BHS	Elliger, Karl, Wilhelm Rudolph, et al., eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelschiftung, 1977.
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibOr	<i>Biblica et orientalia</i>
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTZ	<i>Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	Gelb, Ignace J., et al. <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . 21 vols. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.
CAL	Kaufman, Stephen A., ed. <i>Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon</i> . http://cal.huc.edu .
CANE	Sasson, Jack M., ed. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . 4 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995.
CAT	Dietrich, Manfred, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds. <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> . 3rd ed. AOAT 360. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary

CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
<i>ChrCent</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
CML	Driver, Godfrey R., ed. <i>Canaanite Myths and Legends</i> . Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956. 2nd ed. edited by John C. L. Gibson, 1978.
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds. <i>The Context of Scripture</i> . 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016.
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles- lettres</i>
CTH	Catalog der Texte der Hethiter
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerol- ogy
DBAT	<i>Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rez- eption in der Alten Kirche</i>
DBH	Dresdner Beiträge zur Hethitologie
DCH	Clines, David J. A. ed. <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014.
DDD	Toorn, Karel van der, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds. <i>Dictionary of Demons and Deities</i> . 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
DULAT	Olmo Lete, Gregorio del, and Joaquín Sanmartín. A <i>Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> . 3rd ed. 2 vols. Translated and edited by Wil- fred G. E. Watson. HdO 1.67. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
EA	El-Amarna tablets. According to the edition of Jørgen A. Knudtzon. <i>Die el-Amarna-Tafeln</i> . Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908–1915. Repr., Aalen: Zeller, 1964. Continued in Anson F. Rainey, <i>El-Amarna Tablets</i> , 359–379. 2nd ed. Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1978.
EBib	Études bibliques
EBR	Klauck, Hans-Josef, ed. <i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–.
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary

<i>EHLL</i>	Khan, Geoffrey, ed. <i>Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics</i> . 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
<i>EncJud</i>	Skolnik, Fred, and Michael Berenbaum, eds. <i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . 2nd ed. 22 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
f.pl.	feminine plural
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FFC	Folklore Fellows Communications
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
f.s.	feminine singular
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
GKB	Bergsträsser, Gotthelf. <i>Hebräische Grammatik</i> . 2 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1918–1929.
GKC	Kautzsch, Emil, ed. <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Translated by Arther E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
GVG	Brockelmann, Carl. <i>Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen</i> . 2 vols. Berlin: Reuther & Reichard; New York: Lemcke & Buechne, 1908–1913. Repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1961.
<i>HAL</i>	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> . 3rd ed. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1995, 2004.
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs

HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HRCS	Hatch, Edwin, and Henry A. Redpath. <i>Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament</i> . 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1897. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HvTSt	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies (HTS Teologiese Studies/ HTS Theological Studies)</i>
IBHS	Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael O'Connor. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
IDB	Buttrick, George A., ed. <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.
IDBSup	Crim, Keith, ed. <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume</i> . Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANEH	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
Jastrow	Jastrow, Marcus. <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushlami, and the Midrashic Literature</i> . 2 vols. London: Luzac, 1903.
JBA	Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>

JBR	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JEOL	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JLR	<i>Journal of Law and Religion</i>
JNF	incantation bowl in private collections being edited by J. N. Ford (courtesy of Ms. Lisa Marie Knothe)
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JPA	Jewish Palestinian Aramaic
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSem	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
KAI	Donner, Herbert, and Wolfgang Röllig. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.
KAR	Ebeling, Erich. <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</i> . 2 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1919–1923.
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KAV	Schroeder, Otto. <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts</i> . Osnabrück: Zeller, 1920.
KBL	Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i> . 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1958.
KBo	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i> . Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916–1923; Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1954–.

KJV	King James Version
KTU	Dietrich, Manfred, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds. <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . 3rd ed. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
KUSATU	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
KWU	Tropper, Josef. <i>Kleines Wörterbuch des Ugaritischen</i> . Elementa Linguarum Orientis 4. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008.
LÄ	Helck, Wolfgang, Eberhard Otto, and Wolfhart Westendorf, eds. <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> . Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972.
LANE	Languages of the Ancient Near East
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
Leš	<i>Lešonenu</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>LingAeg</i>	<i>Lingua Aegyptia</i>
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MARI	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MARV	<i>Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte</i>
MÄS	Münchener ägyptologische Studien
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MGWJ	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
m.pl.	masculine plural
MRLA	Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra
m.s.	masculine singular
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Muséon: Revue d'études orientales</i>
MVAG	Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft
NA ²⁸	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.
NABU	<i>Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
<i>NedTT</i>	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NET	New English Translation; http://netbible.com

NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIB	Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NM	Neo-Mandaic
NOAB	Coogan, Michael D., ed. <i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
O.Cairo	ostrakon in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo
OEANE	Meyers, Eric M. ed. <i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . 5 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OM	Orient et Méditerranée: archéologie
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	Charlesworth, James H., ed. <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985.
OtSt	Oudtestamentische studiën
Ox. Opp. Add.	manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oppenheim Collection
PAAJR	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PAe	<i>Probleme der Ägyptologie</i>
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
PLO	Porta Linguarum Orientalium
PRU	Le Palais royal d'Ugarit
PSB	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
Qad	<i>Qadmoniot</i>

R	Rawlinson, Henry, et al. <i>The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia</i> . 5 vols. London: Bowler, 1861–1909.
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RAI	Rencontre assyriologique internationale
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
REg	<i>Revue d'Égyptologie</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
RelSRev	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
ResOr	Res Orientales
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RGTC	Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RIMS	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Supplements
RLA	Ebeling, Erich, et al., eds. <i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.
RS	Ras Shamra
RSO	Ras Shamra-Ougarit
RSO	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAK	<i>Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur</i>
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SEL	<i>Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico</i>
Sem	<i>Semitica</i>
SGKAO	Schriften Zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients
Shnaton	<i>Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

SMEA	<i>Studi Micenei ed Egeo Anatolici</i>
SSL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPohl	Studia Pohl
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
SymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TDOT	Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Helmer Ringgren, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TEV	Today's English Version
THAT	Jenni, Ernst, and Claus Westermann, eds. <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser, 1971.
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
T-S	manuscript in the Taylor-Schechter Collection, Cambridge University Library
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TSO	Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik
TTKY	Türk Tarih Kurumu yayınlarından
TUAT	Kaiser, Otto, ed. <i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i> . Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984–.
TvT	<i>Tijdschrift voor Theologie</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UNP	Parker, Simon B., ed. <i>Ugaritic Narrative Poetry</i> . WAW 9. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.
VA	item in the collection of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
VAS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmaler
VAT	museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
Vat. ebr.	Hebrew manuscript from the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WGL	Weidner God List
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
YJS	Yale Judaica Series
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Studies in Biblical Wisdom and Poetry

World Order in the Doxologies of Amos and Job

Jonathan Ben-Dov

Biblical scholars have increasingly come to understand the dynamic that governs biblical poetry. Those accustomed to thinking of this literature as rigid, bound by parallelism, and unable to free itself from the traditions of the Hebrew-Canaanite poetic school will be surprised by the extent of its dynamic. Thanks to the groundbreaking work of Ed Greenstein and his colleagues, we can now truly appreciate just how far from the truth our inflexible notion of parallelism has been.¹

Herein I offer a dynamic reading of passages in Amos and Job that describe world order. The authors conceived the world as governed by a dialectical relationship between a series of dyads, balancing between proximity/distance, convergence/divergence, tension/unity, and so on. Its continued existence is thus dependent upon the tension between the opposites. The authors focus on the point at which the pairs meet in order to describe decisive moments in world order. Literary accounts of this type are particularly characteristic of poetry, whose features make it especially conducive for depicting dialectical processes.² According to

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1. See Edward L. Greenstein, "How Does Parallelism Mean?," in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature*, ed. L. Nemoy et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 41–70; Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985); James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Ziony Zevit, "Roman Jakobson, Psycholinguistics, and Biblical Poetry," *JBL* 109 (1990): 385–401.

2. For the distinction between prose and poetry, see Shemaryahu Talmon, "Did There Exist a National Biblical Epic?," in *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible* (Jerusalem:

various ancient thinkers, the world is based on polarities that attract and repulse one another. Early texts on nature reflect the desire to tame the chaos of natural phenomena by organizing it into dyadic forces: day/night, land/sea, and so on.³ “Civilization” requires the imposition of a network of coordinates upon the unruly world. The human mind being incapable of imagining or conceiving an unstructured universe, it seeks to impose order based on binary principles.

This philosophical insight is most prominent in the field of anthropology. Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated how the system of opposites can help interpret myths, and others have applied this theory to biblical research.⁴ Other anthropologists argue that, rather than concentrating on extreme opposites, the system centers around the liminal points between them. These challenge binary structures because they belong to neither pole while at the same time representing the full potential of antithesis.⁵ I would like to exemplify this theory via a close literary reading of some biblical texts.

The Doxologies in Amos

The book of Amos contains a number of hymnic fragments that scholars refer to as “doxologies”; they play a significant role in shaping the book’s message.⁶ Diverging from their context, they stand out in both form and

Magnes, 1993), 91–111; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 141–44; Robert Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).

3. Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and other Essays* (London: Cape, 1969).

5. For the classical anthropological literature, see Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: Psychology Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: ARK, 1986).

6. These have been extensively analyzed and discussed; see, for example, the conclusions and bibliography in Steven Paas, *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets*, OtSt 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Meir Weiss, *The Book of Amos* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 2:212–30. An important contribu-

content. Like Semitic hymns in general, each line—and sometimes even twice in the same line—opens with a participle. Each stanza concludes with the refrain “His name is the LORD of Hosts.” Some scholars have gone so far as to reconstruct the early hymn that lies behind all these passages, making use of parallels in Job.⁷ The texts in question are Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:5–6.

Amos 4:13

Behold,
he who formed the mountains
and created the wind
and has told man what his wish is,
who turns blackness into daybreak,
and treads upon the high places of the earth—
his name is the LORD, the God of Hosts.

כִּי הִנֵּה
יוֹצֵר הָרִים
וּבְרָא רוּחַ
וּמְגִיד לְאָדָם מַה-שָּׁחוֹ
עֹשֶׂה שָׁחַר עֵיפָה
וְדֹרֵךְ עַל-בִּמְתֵּי אֶרֶץ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי-צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

Amos 5:8

Who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns deep darkness into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who summons the waters of the sea,
and pours them out upon the earth—
His name is the LORD!

עֹשֶׂה כִּימָה וּבִסִּיל
וְהַפֵּךְ לְבֹקֶר צִלְמוֹת
וַיּוֹסֶם לַיְלָה הַחֲשִׁיד
הַקּוֹרֵא לַמַּיִם הַיָּם
וַיִּשְׁפֹּכֶם עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ
יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ

Amos 9:5–6

It is my LORD the God of Hosts,
at whose touch the earth trembles,
and all who dwell on it mourn,
and all of it swells like the Nile
and subsides like the Nile of Egypt;

וְאֵדֵנִי יְהוָה הַצְבָּאוֹת
הַנּוֹגֵעַ בָּאָרֶץ וְתִמּוֹג
וְאֵבְלוּ כָל-יֹשְׁבֵי בָהּ
וְעִלְתָּה כִּיָּאֵר כָּלָהּ
וַיִּשְׁקַעָה כִּיָּאֵר מִצְרַיִם

who built his chambers in heaven

הַבּוֹנֶה בְּשָׁמַיִם מַעְלוֹתָיו

tion to the subject is Klaus Koch, “Die Rolle der hymnischen Abschnitte in der Komposition des Amos-Buches,” ZAW 86 (1974): 504–37. Noting their dissociation from the context, Koch argues that these passages are late interpolations, inserted at key points in the editorial process. While I agree that they betray an editorial hand, I think that it was early rather than late, reflecting the way nature is conceptualized in the book.

7. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

and founded his vault on the earth,
 who summons the waters of the sea
 and pours them over the land—
 His name is the LORD.

וַאֲגִדְתּוֹ עַל-אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּהּ
 הִקְרָא לַמִּי-הַיָּם
 וַיִּשְׁפְּכֵם עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ
 יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ

All these units interrupt the flow of the text in their respective pericopes. In Amos 4, they provide a dubious conclusion to the orderly pericope of calamity in verses 6–12. In Amos 5, verses 7 and 10 join together seamlessly, verses 8–9 disturbing the coherence. In Amos 9, the doxology intervenes between the well-marked unit of verses 1–4 and the following section that opens in verse 7.

While much of the book of Amos addresses the issues of human justice and injustice, the focus on nature in the doxologies sets them apart.⁸ Nature is, however, a prominent theme in the book, too. It is directly affected by human behavior. When people act improperly, the earth quakes (1:2; 8:8), darkness falls (5:19; 8:9), and droughts and plagues occur (4:6–10). The natural events that occur in the doxologies, in contrast, are independent of human action, relating solely to God's handiwork. In these verses, the book of Amos thus appears to represent what happens in the human world by demonstrating the fragile status of the natural order.⁹

The doxologies' most striking feature is the tension between binary opposites: day and night, land and sea, heaven and earth, light and darkness. On some occasions the two are stretched so forcefully that they are torn apart, causing a calamity: "who summons the waters of the sea and pours them over the land" (5:8; 9:6).¹⁰ On others, they are reconciled regularly: "who built his chambers in heaven and founded his vault on the earth." The discrepancy between the normal order of the world and such

8. The short stich "and has told man what his wish is" in 4:13a, not dealing with nature, is possibly corrupt, and one may suggest that the original read *מגיד לאדמה צחו* "Who let resound to the earth his cry"; see Meindert Dijkstra, "Textual Remarks on the Hymn Fragment Amos 4:13," in *Lasset uns Brücken bauen...: Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the IOSOTS, Cambridge 1995*, ed. K. D. Schunk and M. Augustin (Frankfurt: Lang, 1998), 245–53.

9. For the natural order in Amos and the place of the doxologies within this framework, see Susan Gillingham, "'Who Makes the Morning Darkness': God and Creation in the Book of Amos," *SJT* 45 (1992): 165–84; Dylene Heyns, "In the Face of Chaos: Border-Existence as Context for Understanding Amos," *OTE* 6 (1993): 72–89.

10. This is not a reference to the routine cycle of tides because the language is too dramatic. It appears to relate to a natural disaster of some sort (cf. 8:8; 9:5), perhaps a tsunami along the Mediterranean coastline in the wake of an earthquake. Such events are well documented in literature and geophysical finds.

extreme disturbances brings discomfort to the readers. Unsure of what to expect next, they do not understand whether the hymn is one of deliverance or of destruction, creation or calamity.¹¹

Some of the stanzas are ambiguous, appearing at first sight to be speaking of a cataclysm but not in fact doing so. Thus, for example, 5:8 states that God “turns deep darkness into dawn and darkens day into night.” This initially seems to presage disaster, both because of the catastrophe described later on and due to the perilous noun *צלמות* and verb *החשיך*.¹² Closer inspection reveals, however, that it in fact depicts the regular alternation of day and night, not the ominous darkening of the day. The first hemistich speaks of darkness being transformed into dawn (the direction being signified by the preposition *ל*), the second of the deepening of the day into night. The world is thus not threatened by total blackness (as in 5:19) but is operating according to its natural order through the twenty-four-hour cycle. The root *הפך*, which opens the verse, is bidirectional, signifying both parts of the cycle. The order of the words *הפך לבקר צלמות* is misleading. The natural expectation would be a statement to the effect that God will turn darkness into dawn. The phrase *ליום לילה* later on is asyndetic, lacking a preposition to denote the direction of the reversal. Both these factors create a sense of equanimity with respect to the phenomenon and its disturbance. Hereby the poet transcends the regular alternation of the binary opposites. Both ends lie in the hands of God.¹³

A similar, if not even greater, effect is produced by the hemistich *עשה שחר עיפה*. Here also the two poles are juxtaposed asyndetically without a preposition to either join them or evince the direction of the swing. The root *עשי* is likewise neutral.¹⁴ At first glance, this hemistich

11. To this must be added the confusion caused by the initial lines: “he who formed the mountains and created the wind and has told man what his wish is.” This line relates neither to deliverance nor to devastation, nor are its antitheses—which are typically clear in the doxologies—plain or simple. I concur with Dijkstra (“Textual Remarks”) that this verse originally formed part of a theophanic tradition according to which God thundered his voice over the earth so that it shook (cf. Jer 10:10b).

12. This is how Rabbi Joseph Qara understood the verse, followed by numerous modern commentators; see, e.g., Shalom Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 167–68.

13. See Radaq as well as Amos Hakham, *תרי עשר*, Da’at Miqra (Jerusalem: Harav Kook, 1989), 38–39.

14. The LXX adds the conjunction *ו* before *עיפה* in an attempt to “improve” the grammar. As the *lectio difficilior*, the MT is preferable.

appears to relate to the turning of day into night, שחר denoting “dawn” and עיפה bearing the meaning of darkness and gloom, as in Job 10:22: “A land whose light is darkness, all gloom and disarray, whose light is like darkness.”¹⁵ Closer reading, however, reveals that it may also indicate the exact opposite: שחר is the black night and עיפה a poetic term for light, as in Job 3:9: “the glimmerings of the dawn” (עפעפי שחר; cf. Isa 8:20–23).¹⁶ In Job 3:9, this noun (doubling the ע"פ consonants) describes the liminal state between day and night—twilight gloomings and the rising dawn. It thus allows for a dual understanding of the verse: both the turning of dawn into dusk and the night turning to day.

The deceptive nature of the change in direction is a deliberate ploy, constituting the heart of the hymn’s message: God is master of the polarities. As creator he ensures their regular cycle, but he is also responsible for occasionally disturbing it and breaking the bounds of the world. In the conflicted earth described by Job in chapter 10, in contrast, no light shines where it should: “whose light is like darkness” (v. 22). In this imaginary world, there is no natural order because light and darkness do not operate according to their customary function. The author employs all the literary devices at his disposal to focus attention on the poles and their alternation, presenting various possible options to the reader: balance, regular periodicity, or collapse. The movement between the poles is heightened by the dynamic tools of biblical poetry.

15. For the former term see *HALOT*, 1467; for the latter, see *HALOT*, 820. Edouard Dhorme (*A Commentary on the Book of Job* [London: Nelson, 1967]) understands the term עיפתה in Job 10:22 as “darkness,” proposing that the phrase כמו אפל is a gloss explaining it, thus repeating a parallel expression at the end of the verse: ותפע כמו אפל. In his opinion, צלמות is similarly a gloss, heightening the sense of gloom. The latter proposal is unnecessary, however, being based solely on considerations of meter. I prefer Ginsberg’s suggestion (below).

16. Paul (*Amos*, 137, 155) translates: “Who turns blackness into glimmering light.” See also Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: A Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: JTS, 1978), and compare Job 11:17 and Joel 2:2. The discussion as a whole hinges on Jonah ibn Janah’s dictionary (preceded by Saadia Gaon), introduced into modern research by Harold L. Ginsberg, “An Unrecognized Allusion to Kings Pekah and Hosea of Israel (Isa 8:23),” *ErIsr* 5 (1958): *61–*65.

Job 26

Nature and world order are a central theme in the book of Job.¹⁷ Job's first complaint, in chapter 3, comprises a lengthy list of natural phenomena laced in a dynamic poetic structure. It is, indeed, more an imprecation against the polarities on which the world turns—day and night, life and death, work and leisure, rich and poor—than a lament over God's justice.¹⁸ Later on, a number of nature hymns are interwoven into the speeches (5:8–10; 9:5–10; 36–37; and, to some extent, 28). Resembling the doxologies in Amos, they depict a terrifying, powerful God who governs nature with an iron rod and whose workings often seem random. Finally, when God answers Job, rather than addressing the issue of injustice, he adduces a long list of natural phenomena, both realistic and fantastic, from the luminaries to climate and fauna.¹⁹

Like ancient Near Eastern literature in general, biblical texts reflect the belief that justice and morality are inextricably bound up in the conduct of nature. When justice is upheld, the world runs in an orderly fashion; otherwise, it upsets the laws of nature.²⁰ Job, who accuses God of not managing the world properly, contests the laws of nature, believing that in their present state they are weapons in God's hands (see Job 9:1–19 and esp. 9:22). The hymns indicate how Job conceived world order, the points at which he attacks it revealing his *Weltbild*.

17. See, e.g., Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, JSOTSup 112 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991); Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

18. For the light/darkness antithesis, see Meir Malul, "Eḏūtu 'Darkness' and Iṭṭu [sic] 'Clay' (Gilg. XI 106, 118): Poetic License or Corruption Due to Etymological Similarity? Another Interpretation," in *An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, ed. Y. Sefati et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 548–56. For the catalogs of natural objects in Job, see Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context*, JSOTSup 213 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009), 84–114.

19. See Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 196–240; Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 95–109.

20. See generally Hans H. Schmidt, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968); with regard to the Psalms, see Shammai Gelernder, *The Religious Experience in the Book of Psalms* (Bern: Lang, 2015), 137–61. A similar message appears in the Aqhat Epic (KTU 1.19, col. I), where, mourning for his son, the king's judgment is affected, as a result of which the rains fail and the land becomes arid; cf. the Legend of Kirta (KTU 1.16, col. III).

The location of Job 26 within the garbled third cycle of speeches is the subject of much debate. The previous chapter 25 consists of Bildad's response, quoting earlier poems from 4:17–19 and 15:14–16. Following a brief rhetorical unit in verses 1–4, in which the previous speaker (Bildad?) is mocked,²¹ the speaker extols God for creating and maintaining the world.

מַתַּחַת מַיִם וְשִׁכְנֵיהֶם	הַרְפָּאִים יִחֹלְלוּ	5
וְאֵין כְּסוּת לְאַבְדּוֹן	עָרוֹם שְׂאוֹל נָגִדוּ	6
תִּלָּה אֶרֶץ עַל-בְּלִי-מָה	נָשָׂה צָפוֹן עַל-תְּהוֹ	7
וְלֹא-נִבְקַע עֵנָן תַּחְתָּם	צָרָר-מַיִם בְּעֵבְיוֹ	8
פָּרָשׁוּ עָלָיו עֲנָנוּ	מָאֲחִז פְּנֵי-כֶסֶה	9
עַד-תִּכְלִית אֹר עַם-חֹשֶׁךְ	חָק-חֹג עַל-פְּנֵי-מַיִם	10
וַיִּתְּמֵהוּ מִגַּעְרָתוֹ	עַמּוּדֵי שָׁמַיִם יְרוּפּוּ	11
וּבִתְּבוּנָתוֹ (וּבִתְּבוּנָתוֹ) מִחֵץ רָהַב	בָּכְחוֹ רָגַע הַיָּם	12
חִלְלָה יָדוֹ נָחַשׁ בְּרָח	בְּרוּחוֹ שָׁמַיִם שִׁפְרָה	13
וְרַעַם גְּבוּרָתוֹ מִי יִתְּבוּן	הוֹ-אַלֶּה קְצוֹת דְּרָכּוֹ	14

- 5 The shades tremble / beneath the waters and their denizens.
- 6 Sheol is naked before him; / Abaddon has no cover.
- 7 He it is who stretched out Zaphon over chaos, / who suspended earth over emptiness.
- 8 He wrapped up the waters in his clouds; / yet no cloud burst under their weight.
- 9 He shuts off the view of his throne, / spreading his cloud over it.
- 10 He drew a boundary on the surface of the waters, / at the extreme where light and darkness meet.
- 11 The pillars of heaven tremble, / astounded at his blast.
- 12 By his power he stilled the sea; / by his skill he struck down Rahab.
- 13 By his wind the heavens were calmed; / his hand pierced the Elusive Serpent.
- 14 These are but glimpses of his rule, / the mere whisper that we perceive of him; / who can absorb the thunder of his mighty deeds?

This is an ode to God in praise of his deeds of old, when he defeated the sea and its monsters, creating the world in the wake of (or before; see below) this victory. The summary in verse 14—the only verse containing three stiches—

21. For scholarly views on the identity of speakers in Job 25–27, see note 23 below.

proclaims that everything recounted to this point is only a fraction of God's workings. In good hymnic fashion, most lines open with a participle.²²

The hymn is customarily thought to constitute an elaboration of Bildad's brief speech in chapter 25, but Tur Sinai imbued it to Job.²³ The point at which the hymn begins is unclear. All the motifs in verses 7–13 form part of a well-established tradition regarding the storm-god's combat with the sea. Verses 5–6 do not seem to belong, however,²⁴ and thus Tur-Sinai and others suggest that they are a continuation of 25:1–6, which relates to Yahweh's superiority over the lesser, subservient gods.²⁵ The hymn thus only begins in 26:7. It follows an ancient tradition according to which the formation of the world was an act of violence, creation demanding an exertion of force.²⁶ Epic poetry forms a particularly good medium for conveying this tradition. My interest here lies in demonstrating how, although held fast by the chains of tradition, this hymn exhibits distinctive features that highlight the polarities, drawing from them a novel view of world order.

22. See Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 44–45.

23. For Bildad, see, e.g., Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, OTL (London: SCM, 1985), 364–68; and the various proposals regarding the “sources” of Job 25–27 summarized by Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection*, 286. Habel argues that Bildad's cosmological speech originally included 25:1–6 and 26:5–14. The quotation of 4:12–21 in chapter 25 led Naftali H. Tur-Sinai (*The Book of Job: A New Commentary* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967], 379) to argue that Job 25 forms part of Job's rather than Bildad's speech. Edward L. Greenstein (“Job,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. A. Berlin and M. Brettler [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014], 1556) added further rigor to the identification of Bildad as the speaker. He contends that the speech comprised 25:1, 26:2–4, 25:4–6, 25:2–3, followed by the doxology in 26:5–14.

24. See John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and recently Noga Ayali-Darshan, *The Storm God and the Sea: The Origin, Versions, and Diffusion of a Myth throughout the Ancient Near East*, trans. Liat Keren, ORA 37 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Ayali-Darshan, “The Question of the Order of Job 26,7–13 and the Cosmogonic Tradition of Zaphon,” *ZAW* 126 (2014): 402–17.

25. Tur-Sinai, *Book of Job*, 379. According to Ayali-Darshan, the sequence begins with 25:1–6, explaining that humans cannot rebel against Yahweh, and continues with 26:5–6 stating that the same is also true of the inhabitants of Sheol; 26:11–13 then reinforce this idea by describing God's mighty deeds of yore, when he fought the sea and its aides.

26. See Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3–50.

In its extant form, Job 26:7–13 first recounts that God's abode was established on Mount Zaphon (26:7).²⁷ He then drew the waters into the clouds and placed them in the sky (26:8–9), bounding them with the horizon (26:10). As a result of his rebuke, the pillars of heaven quaked (26:11). He then battled the sea and its monsters (26:12–13). This order fits neither the plot development nor the mythological tradition, the world being created prior to the combat. Ayali-Darshan thus has recently claimed that the original order had been verses 12–13, 11, 10, 8–9, 7b, 7a.²⁸ This forms a logical plot: the storm-god fights the sea and its monsters, the pillars of heaven shake from the fury of the battle, God confines the waters, drawing them into the clouds that serve to hide his throne, and, finally, creates the world and erects his dwelling on Mount Zaphon. The order had become corrupt even before the hymn reached the author—or he deliberately changed it in order to heighten the dramatic effect.²⁹ Rather than determining the original order, however, my interest here lies in the poetic form in which the hymn and each of its lines are cast.

Let us look at the polarities. Verse 7—*נָטָה צִפּוֹן עַל תְּהוֹ / תִּלָּה אֶרֶץ עַל—בְּלִימָה*—opens with the proclamation of a fundamental binary opposition in the world between stability and lability or order and chaos. Despite the disputes over the exact meaning of *צִפּוֹן*, it clearly relates to a mountain, which also appears in Ugaritic and Hurrian literature, known as the storm-god's abode.³⁰ Verse 7 constitutes a mythological account of building the divine abode, which forms a central element of plots of this type (e.g., the Baal Cycle [KTU 1.4 V]; cf. Exod 15:17), but the choice of words for it is surprising. In verse 7, *צִפּוֹן* parallels *אֶרֶץ*. This is an unusual correlation,

27. For the meaning of “Zaphon,” see J. J. M. Roberts, “ŠAPŌN in Job 26,7,” *Bib* 56 (1975): 554–57; Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” 410–11.

28. Day (*God's Conflict with the Dragon*, 39), however, posits that the order suggests that the events all took place synchronically.

29. Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” 409. For the reworking of material in order to accommodate it to poetic needs, see Murray Lichtenstein, “Biblical Poetry,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. B. W. Holtz (New York: Summit, 1984), 105–28. Ayali-Darshan's hypothesis accounts for the placement of the act of creation prior to the story of the hostilities as an attempt to heighten the dramatic climax, but it does not account for other changes in the order of the hymn. Why is God's throne erected on Mount Zaphon (7a) before the world is created (7b), and why do vv. 8–9 precede v. 10?

30. Habel, *Book of Job*, 371; Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” and the bibliography and ancient Near Eastern sources cited therein.

appearing nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.³¹ While Zaphon and the earth represent firm phenomena, they are paired with the fragile entities תהו and בלימה! Such an ode might be expected to adduce the earth and Mount Zaphon as examples of solidity, but in fact they symbolize the opposite: the earth is precariously suspended, and Mount Zaphon hangs over a void.³²

Using two precarious elements—“chaos” and “void”—verse 7 intimates that Mount Zaphon and the earth have no firm foundations but are suspended in the air. Not only the nouns, but also the verbs have been clearly chosen to undercut the stable binary principles on which the world rests. While the rootedness of the world is usually signaled by the roots יסד and כון (see Ps 24:2; cf. 104:5), the root נטה usually signifies the stretching out of a tent on its poles, describing the heavens as a thin, flimsy sheet stretched over the earth without real substance.³³ Isaiah 40:22, for example, says that God “spread out the skies like gauze, stretched them out like a tent to dwell in.” In Job 26:7, however, it is Mount Zaphon that is stretched out—an absurd, even surreal, image. The second verb, תלה, is also awkward in the context of creation. It generally denotes the suspension of an object at a single point, highlighting its instability (see Deut 28:66). In place of the customary biblical depiction of the earth as resting on a solid, firm foundation, the author of Job describes it as a picture hanging by a nail.³⁴ The author thus appears to have gone out of his way to create a poetic account of its precarious nature. Together with the mountains, it wobbles on a pinhead or a stretched sheet, dangling from a thread. The

31. In Ps 89:10–13, which resembles Job 26 in content, Zaphon parallels ימין, the names of two mountains—Tabor and Hermon—also appearing in close proximity.

32. See Habel, *Book of Job*, 372. Ayali-Darshan (“Question of the Order,” 410) associates the void with the primeval waters in light of the fact that the phrase תהו ובהו appears in conjunction with the waters in Gen 1:2 and due to her reconstruction of the passage, in which v. 9 precedes v. 7. The parallelism clearly links תהו with בלימה in the second stich, however, which annuls the mythological reference to Gen 1:2. Even if Mount Zaphon rests on the primeval waters, the dynamic of this line aims to express the idea that these waters are “void”; cf. אפס ותהו in Isa 40:17.

33. Cf. Isa 42:5; 45:11–12. See HALOT, 693 (“stretch out”); and Habel, *Book of Job*, 371.

34. Ayali-Darshan (“Question of the Order,” 23) notes that the root נטה generally relates to the heavens. Habel (*Book of Job*, 372) suggests that the odd cosmological depiction in v. 7 reflects Greek traditions. His conclusion that it signifies that God dwells in places beyond human reach, however, fails to explain why the text then proceeds to describe the creation and God’s battles.

earth exists in a unique condition: its enormous weight is only anchored at a single point, this being the only thing that prevents it from canting.

The image of a tight line marking the boundary between order and disorder continues in 26:8, which depicts the clouds in the sky. Rather than praising their multitude and the rain they produce, their weight or black looming, as we find elsewhere (see 2 Sam 22:12; Ps 18:12; Job 37:15–16), the author states that God created a kind of film or membrane for them—“He wrapped up the waters in his clouds”—in order to prevent them from bursting from the weight of the water they contain. The root צרר generally signifies the gathering of objects into a bundle (see Exod 12:34; Josh 19:4; 1 Sam 25:29 [metaphorically]). It occurs in a cosmological sense, as here, in Prov 30:4 and in Hos 4:19 (obscurely). As in Job 26:7, here also the picture is of a threatening force held back by a thin film. While the waters press upon the clouds that hold them in, the clouds themselves are firmly delineated by God’s word (Ps 33:6–9). This fine membrane prevents the waters from spilling out and flooding the earth. The author focuses on this thin perimeter point, which both belongs and does not belong to the clouds at one and the same time.

Verse 9 continues to relate to the clouds, addressing another aspect of their nature: serving as a barrier between God and his creatures. This is a familiar biblical description (e.g., Exod 19:16; 24:15–16).³⁵ Here, however, the clouds are said to be laid out (פרשו from the root ש/פרס) like a thin blanket, covering the divine throne and concealing it from view.³⁶ In other places, this partitioning is represented as a thin layer known as רקיע, “firmament” (Gen 1:6–8; Exod 24:10; Ezek 1:22).³⁷ Job 26:9 thus describes the clouds as a thin stratum of material dividing God from the world. This

35. Habel, *Book of Job*, 372.

36. For the word פרשו, see HALOT, 978. The term כֶּסֶה may be a deviant spelling of the more usual כָּסָה (cf. 1 Kgs 11:19). Some commentators, such as Ibn Ezra, HALOT, and Dhorme (*Commentary on the Book*, 372–73), read it as כֶּסֶה/כָּסָה, “full moon” (cf. Ps 81:4; Prov 7:20). It seems better to understand it as denoting the divine throne despite the unusual spelling, both because of the reference to Zaphon as the divine abode in v. 7 and because of the affinities it exhibits with the depiction of God as dwelling in the heavens (Job 22:12–14); see Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” 403 n. 6. The idea that the clouds are thin films rather than a thick mass may also rest on the root אָחַז earlier in the verse. Here this signifies a covering, quite likely associated with the Akkadian verb *uhhuzu* “to cover” (Dhorme).

37. See Friedhelm Hartenstein, “Wolkendunkel und Himmelsfeste: Zur Genese und Kosmologie der Vorstellung des himmlischen Heiligtums JHWHs,” in *Das bib-*

verse thus continues the line of the previous ones, in which this slender membrane carries the poetic weight.

The poetics of boundaries and polarities reaches its climax in verse 10, which portrays the waters as being enclosed within a perimeter. This is also a conventional creation image, forming part of the account of the battle with the sea (e.g., Jer 5:22; Job 38:8–11). The delineation in verse 10 is unique, however, differing even from that in verse 12. The circumscribing of the waters is usually portrayed as a violent act of force. Verse 12 thus states: “By his power he stilled the sea,” and a similar message is conveyed in Isa 51:15 and Job 38:8–11.³⁸ In verse 10, however, the encircling takes the form of a balancing of the forces at work during creation. Here the demarcation of the sea is an engineering-planning feat that arouses no resistance. The phrase *חַק חֶג עַל פְּנֵי מַיִם* signifies how God drew a line marking the edge of the waters. A common emendation reads *חַק חֶג*, in line with Prov 8:27: “He fixed the horizon [*בַּחֲקוֹ חֶג*] upon the deep.” The *חֶג* is a circle that encompasses the earth, most likely the horizon beyond which God dwells (Isa 40:22; Job 22:14).³⁹

Once again the author draws attention to the fine line that separates the polarities, this time addressing that between land and sea. The nature of the poetic dichotomies, however, is such that it never confines itself to one dimension. Here that between the day and night also appears, as indicated later in the verse: “At the extreme where light and darkness meet.” God encircles the sea precisely at the point at which light meets darkness—the horizon. The author seeks to draw all the poles into a single boundary. The circle, which defines sea and light, land and darkness, constitutes a significant element of the structure of the world.

Is the hymn in Job 26:7–13 a song of praise? We would expect an erudite ode of praise of the creator to come from Bildad, while Job would vent his bitterness and defiance against God. The unit is, in fact, neither, its

liche Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte, ed. B. Janowski and B. Ego, FAT 32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 125–79.

38. For the metaphor of the waters being bound and diapered like an infant, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 99. For the various ways in which the biblical traditions describe the subjugation of the sea and its parameters, see Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” 410.

39. For its identification with the horizon, see Ayali-Darshan, “Question of the Order,” 410; Menahem Zvi Kaddari, *Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006), 278; *HALOT*, 295.

primary stress lying on the precariousness of the world. In fact, it is highly ironical. Although it lauds God for his greatness, it questions the reliability of his deeds. Where the lay reader is impressed by God's great and mighty works, a sophisticated reader will discern the layer of scorn and recalcitrance that lurks beneath the surface.⁴⁰

In this context, it is worth noting the difference between the brief odes to nature in Job 5 (Eliphaz) and 9 (Job). The short unit in 5:9–10 follows the declaration of God's greatness in verse 8.

עֲשֵׂה גְדֻלּוֹת וְאֵין חֶקֶר / נִפְלְאוֹת עַד-אֵין מִסְפָּר
הַנֶּתֶן מָטָר עַל-פְּנֵי-אֶרֶץ / וְשִׁלַּח מַיִם עַל-פְּנֵי חוּצוֹת

- 9 Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed, / wondrous things without number
- 10 Who gives rain to the earth, / and sends water over the fields

As predictable, Eliphaz praises God's greatness. Verse 9 contains a formulaic statement of his mighty workings (cf. Ps 136:4). Verse 10 cites an example. In 9:5–10, however, Job adopts a more complex approach:

הַמַּעֲתִיק הָרִים וְלֹא יָדְעוּ / אֲשֶׁר הִפָּכֶם בְּאַפּוֹ
הַמְרִיגֵיז אֶרֶץ מִמְקוֹמָהּ / וְעִמּוּדֶיהָ יִתְפַּלְצוּן
הָאֹמֵר לַחֶרֶס וְלֹא יִזְרַח / וּבָעֵד בּוֹכָבִים יַחֲתֶם
נָטָה שָׁמַיִם לְבָדוֹ / וְדוֹרָד עַל-בִּמְתֵּי יָם
עֲשֵׂה-עֵשׂ בְּסִיל וּבִימָהּ / וְחִדְרֵי תִמָּן
עֲשֵׂה גְדֻלּוֹת עַד-אֵין חֶקֶר / וְנִפְלְאוֹת עַד-אֵין מִסְפָּר

- 5 Him who moves mountains without their knowing it, / who overturns them in His anger
- 6 who shakes the earth from its place, / till its pillars quake;
- 7 who commands the sun not to shine; / who seals up the stars;
- 8 who by himself spread out the heavens, / and trod on the back of the sea;
- 9 who made the Bear and Orion, / Pleiades, and the chambers of the south wind;

40. Carol Newsom (*The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 130–68) argues that the book of Job is revolutionary in citing and responding to traditional language. In her view, the perspective of divine violence led the author to overturn the literary conventions governing narrative, poetry, and biblical law.

- 10 who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed, / and wondrous things without number.

The hymn is introduced by the ironic proclamation in verse 4 that God is “wise of heart and mighty in power—who ever challenged him and came out whole?” Rather than praise, this is a bitter complaint that his power is so great that no one can withstand it (cf. 9:1–3, 22, 32–35). In this spirit, Job adduces a long list of “wonders” in verses 5–7: God moves mountains, shakes the earth, and causes eclipses and other events that upset the natural order and inspire fear in human beings. All these symbolize God’s “rule of terror,” in Tur-Sinai’s terms. This is immediately followed by a more standard conclusion, which quotes passages from other biblical texts and even verses from Job itself. Verse 8 corresponds to Isa 44:24; verse 9 recalls Amos 5:8; verse 10 cites Eliphaz’s words in the brief hymn 5:10.⁴¹ Here the irony is reversed: the simple reader will think that Job is praising God, while he in fact mocks the capriciousness of his deeds and their destructive effect.⁴² The term *נפלאות*, like other terms discussed above, enfolds an ambiguous position. While in 5:10 it praises God’s wondrous deeds, in 9:10 it is used ironically to express the opposite emotion: God’s deeds defy human understanding because they are arbitrary and nonsensical, and no logic can be found in them.⁴³

I suggest that the poem in Job 26 is a piece of irony and perhaps even cynicism on the randomness of the world, like the brief poem in Job’s speech in Job 9. It both lauds and mocks the order of the world at the same time. While it points out the positive aspects of the universe, it also reveals them as fragile and flimsy, easily upset.

41. The book of Job often quotes earlier biblical verses while transforming their meaning. For this phenomenon see Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Job Intertextually*, LHBOTS 574 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

42. For the irony in the book of Job, see Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection*, 212–21. For the irony in Job 9, see James W. Whedbee, “The Comedy of Job,” *Semeia* 7 (1977): 1–39, esp. 16. See also David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 229.

43. A similar claim is made in the people’s complaint to Ezekiel: “The way of the Lord is unfair” (Ezek 18:25); it is also reflected in the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:3); see Michael Segal, “1 Samuel 2:3: Text, Exegesis and Theology” [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 13 (2000): 83–95.

Conclusion

Several biblical hymns describe the divine world in terms of binary opposites, stressing the tensions and unities between the polarities and the points of contact between them. The main burden of meaning is loaded on the borderlines between the opposites, a series of metaphorical places that exemplifies the entire dynamic. Diverging from conventional poetic tradition, their authors deliberately chose words and forms that disrupt the frozen order, depicting nature as a dynamic between parts of the pairings. In Amos, the doxologies portray God as high and mighty, just as capable of harming as of doing good. In Job, a similar emphasis exists. The author adduces the dimensions of God's activity customarily regarded as praiseworthy but places them ironically in a new context and poetic framework.

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The Art of Poetry in Jeremiah 17:5–8

F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp

Curses and blessings are among the most widely attested genres of power in traditional societies, and they form the structural foundation for the poetic saying in Jer 17:5–8.¹ The little poem breaks into two halves: the first half (vv. 5–6) is dedicated to the curse and consists of an initial triplet (v. 5) followed by two couplets (v. 6), while the second half (vv. 7–8) is dedicated to the blessing and consists of four couplets. That these verses form a whole is suggested most eloquently from literary considerations. The opening lines of each section are made to mirror one another closely (ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח ביהוה, v. 7 // ארור הגבר אשר יבטח באדם, v. 5), as are the central lines involving the play between ראה “to see” and ירא “to fear” (ולא ירא כי־יבא חס, v. 8 // ולא יראה כי־יבוא טוב, v. 6), and both sections feature similes involving flora (בעץ, v. 8 // כערער, v. 6). Indeed, though curses and blessings could be posed independently, they often also are thought through as a binary whole (e.g., in the treaty formulary, see Deut 27–28; Gen 27:29; Num 24:9; Prov 30:11; cf. Job 1:5; 2:9; En Gedi 2). The two featured terms, ארור “cursed” and ברוך “blessed,” even appear in a pair of chiasmatically shaped couplets in Jer 20:14: “cursed [ארור] be the day” // “let it not be blessed [ברוך].”² So there is little doubt that these lines are

1. The poem is preserved in both MT and LXX. The opening phrase in MT, כה אמר יהוה, is judged by most commentators to be a secondary addition on the strength of the phrase’s absence in LXX and the fact that the little poem is not an actual oracle of Yahweh (e.g., William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 489 n. a). Space limitations permit only brief notice of significant textual issues. An early version of this essay was presented at a session on the poetry of Jeremiah at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (20 November 2012). I offer the essay here in celebration of the life and work of my good friend and colleague, Ed Greenstein, and in gratitude for his support and friendship over the years.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

intentionally shaped as a whole. Further, they are literally chained together by a sequence of conjunctive *waws* that head twelve of the poem's fifteen lines ("... / and ... / and ... / and ...") in MT.³ The lone triplet (v. 5) stands out (against the ground of couplets) retrospectively as marking the poem's beginning.⁴

The chief thematic point of the little poem is easy enough to state: to motivate trust in Yahweh. To achieve this end, the prophet mobilizes a mutually reinforcing curse and blessing, each rooted in an imagination sedimenting simile. The verbal language of trust (בטח) in Jeremiah almost always focuses on humans or human cultural objects (e.g., language, architecture) and is negatively charged (Jer 5:17; 7:4, 8, 14; 9:3; 13:25; 28:15; 29:31; 46:25; 48:7; 49:4). Therefore that the poem opens with the curse is most congenial to a sensibility that pervades the larger collection—and as will be seen the blessing section is itself modeled on the curse. The first section (or stanza) of the poem (vv. 5–6) invokes a curse against any person (lit. any "man," הגבר) who trusts in humanity and human capacities while turning away from Yahweh. Curses are a standard staple of traditional word art. But in this case, however ultimately composed, it would seem that the wording is inspired most directly by written nonverse. Consider the following parallels:

ארור האדם אשר יפתח את זאת

Cursed be the man who opens this (tomb)! (Silwan 1.2–3, ca. 700 BCE)

[] ארר. אשר ימחה

Cursed be anyone who wipes out.... (En Gedi 2.1, ca. eighth century BCE)

ארור האיש אשר יעשה פסל

Cursed be the man who makes an idol.... (Deut 27:15)

3. The versions for a variety of reasons—stylistic, performative, text-critical—do not exhibit the same high number of line initial conjunctions.

4. Both the extra spacing (*setuma*) after Jer 17:4 in Aleppo and B19a and the secondary addition of *כה אמר יהוה* (absent in LXX) provide additional support for understanding the start of a new section of some sort in Jer 17:5. There is also extra spacing before the new stanza beginning in v. 7 (so the *setuma* in both Aleppo and B19a after v. 6), but nothing after v. 8—the next extra spacing coming between vv. 10 and 11.

ארור האיש לפני יהוה אשר יקום

Cursed be the man who rises up before Yahweh.... (Josh 6:26)

ארור האיש אשר יאכל לחם

Cursed be the man who eats food.... (1 Sam 14:24; cf. v. 28)

ארור האיש אשר לא ישמע

Cursed be the man who does not listen.... (Jer 11:3; cf. 20:15)

It is not that ארור cannot be used poetically, as it plainly is, for example, in Gen 49:7 and Num 24:9. Rather, it is just that the particular phrasing in Jer 17:5 (cf. 20:14, 15) looks to be adapted from prosaic diction.⁵ After all, everyday language, spoken and (when available) written, provides the basic material out of which poetry is made the world over. So note the slightly elongated line here (eleven syllables; also its echo in v. 7) and the use of the definite article and the relative particle. Both of the latter, so-called prose particles are sometimes thought not to belong properly to biblical poetry, that is, because they are the kind of deictic markers that arise specifically with written (and read) discourse. However, once written prose becomes acculturated and habitually in use, there is no reason that poets (and prophets) would not begin to poach prose diction for their poetry. With the evolution of written prose in a Hebrew script antedating the collected “words” of Jeremiah by several centuries (at least), there is no doubt that the world out of which Jeremianic poetry emerged was one in which written Hebrew prose was a familiar phenomenon.⁶

Still, it has also been plainly shaped poetically. So the length of the line, for example, though elongated does not exceed traditional length

5. Such formulaic cursing is not typical of the Psalms, wisdom, or prophetic tradition; the root ארר itself only occurs elsewhere in these corpora in Ps 119:21, Job 3:8, and Mal 1:14, 2:2, and 3:9.

6. So most strikingly the book roll that comes to bear this prophet's name contains a great deal of written prose and, as Karel van der Toorn well sees (*Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007], 173–204), is the epitome of a scribal artifact. Additionally, Van der Toorn makes a strong case based on internal evidence for the importance of “written tradition” as a source for Jeremianic poetry (*Scribal Culture*, esp. 188–94). For an account of the emergence of Hebrew prose, see esp. Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); cf. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “An Informing Orality: Biblical Poetic Style,” in *On Biblical Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 233–325, esp. 298–325.

constraints, and it is then fitted into the poem's opening triplet, and thus its sentencing is ultimately chastened by lineation, the interruptive punctuation of pause that typifies all verse. Further, there is a sonic pleasantness that has been given to the phrasing: **אָרור הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר**. The repeated consonance of *resh*, especially in syllable-closing position, not only pricks the ear in this phrase but punctuates the entire first section of the poem. There are fifteen *reshes* in total, ten of them in syllable-closing position. Sound is the medium of traditional performative art, and its shaping through syntax, semantics, and soundplay is crucial for auditory uptake. The rasping of *reshes* here also helps knit the initial stanza into a whole. Other plays with sounds are noticeable as well. The end-rhyme with /-ō/ in the two succeeding lines in the triplet is picked up again later in **טוב** at the end of the second line in verse 6. The added consonance of **בָּשָׂר** and **יָסוּר** join the two closing lines of this lone triplet sonically together and eventually helps identify the problem with trusting in human capability, which otherwise is not obviously a bad thing, namely, its concomitant turn from Yahweh, a worry that Jeremiah thematizes elsewhere (e.g., Jer 3:1, 14, 19; 5:3, 23; 15:19). The manner of the naming of the desert juniper in verse 6, **עֲרֵעַר בְּעֶרְבָה**, with its guttural *ayins*, midlevel /a/s, and repeated *reshes*, is sounded for remembering.⁷ That the **גִּבֹּר** who is **אָרור** is likened to an **עֲרֵעַר** is perhaps not entirely accidental either.⁸

Judah of the late Iron Age remains a world enthused with divinity, and the gods are those who guarantee and fund curses and blessings. Formal cursing is a serious matter, especially when invoked by a person of traditional authority, such as a prophet. Though these sayings of Jeremiah come down to us decontextualized, the issue of their performativity is perhaps not so problematic as some have thought. Third-person curses of this kind become effective—their illocutionary force gets unleashed—precisely when the conditioning circumstances are fulfilled. So in the case of the Silwan tomb inscription, for example, the curse would be activated when the tomb was uncovered, or in the En Gedi inscription, when someone erases the accompanying inscription. The similarly phrased curses in Jer 20:14 and 15 may be assumed to be effected upon their saying (whether actual or fictive) precisely (in part) because their conditioning stipulations are fulfilled: Jeremiah was born, and presumably there was a herald who

7. William L. Holladay ("Style, Irony, and Authenticity in Jeremiah," *JBL* 81 [1962]: 46, 52) says such soundplay is typical of Jeremiah's poetic style.

8. So Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 350.

informed his father of the birth. In Jer 17:5, the conditioning stipulations are elaborated over the course of the opening triplet. The intent of the curse, as with the similarly phrased inscriptional curses, for example, is ultimately motivational, to deflect a trust in human capability that concomitantly turns away from Yahweh. The artfulness of the curse, that is, its not-straightforwardness, is crucial for its aural uptake. The puzzlement of a worry about trust in אדם solicits attention. The succeeding two lines resolve the puzzle by revealing a concomitant and holistic (לֵב and בָּשָׂר; cf. Ps 16:9; 84:3) turn from Yahweh. That is, the issue is trust in human capacity *instead* of trust in Yahweh. The oddly phrased וְשֵׁם בָּשָׂר זִרְעוֹ “and he sets flesh as his ‘arm’” (cf. Judg 6:19) on Yahweh’s mentioning in the next line and again in the blessing (v. 7) will elicit the contrasting image of the distinctly unfleshly “arm of Yahweh,” the deity’s renown weapon of war (Jer 32:17; cf. Exod 15:16; Isa 51:9; Ps 98:1; 2 Chr 32:8). That this is a serious matter, on Jeremiah’s view, is underscored by the very uttering of the curse itself.

Curses are not uncommonly accompanied by symbolic actions (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:10; Jer 34:18), which, in part, help to concretize the message of the curse. The simile of the juniper and its elaboration functions rhetorically in a related way. Indeed, curses commonly employ similes (e.g., “May he roam outside his city *like* a wild ass,” BBS 41.16–18), and there is an entire class of treaty curses that turn on a simile, the so-called simile curse.⁹ The unappealing imagery of the juniper amidst an uninhabitable wasteland in verse 6 doubles, as it were, the traditional force of the curse, adding extra impetus for deflection. The juniper (עֲרֵעַר = *Juniperus oxycedrus*, *Juniperus phoeniceae*; cf. Arabic ‘ar‘ar, Ugaritic ‘r‘r [esp. CAT 1.100.64], Syriac ‘arrā; LXX ἀγριομυρίκη; Vulgate myrice; Jer 48:6; 1QH XVI, 25–27)¹⁰ is native across the Mediterranean and is variable in size and shape and can survive in arid regions.

Given the paucity of attestations in ancient sources, the best guides to the force of the simile come from the immediate literary context and what is known scientifically about the several species of junipers in the contemporary Mediterranean region. What may be said with some confidence is that one accent here falls on the nature of this juniper’s envisioned locale:

9. Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, BibOr 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 18–26.

10. So esp. HALOT, 887; Irene Jacob and Walter Jacob, “Flora,” ABD 2:805; DULAT 1:176.

the salty, hot, barren wasteland of the Arabah: ארץ מלחה is precisely the unblest version of ארץ פרי (esp. Ps 107:34; cf. Judg 9:45; Sir 39:23).¹¹ Such is one of the juniper's known habitats, though one that is not especially hospitable for human habitation: "a land ... that is uninhabitable [by humans, by אדם]." This is very much the point. Both similes in Jer 17:5–8 are layered over with anthropomorphisms, since the similes themselves ultimately say something about the cursed/blessed individual. For example, neither juniper nor well-watered fruit tree literally "sees" or "fears" (as they are not sentient beings). The eighteen or so third masculine singular verb forms and suffixes never fail to completely lose track of the cursed/blessed הגבר (cf. Ps 1:3). To be "like an ערער in the Arabah" is no good thing for people. They cannot survive there.

Treaty curses include several kinds that focus on uninhabitable spaces, the dwelling place of desert animals and Sodom and Gomorrah.¹² Both of these traditions are known from the Jeremiah corpus (e.g., 9:9–10; 49:17–18; 50:39–40; 51:37). Noteworthy is the curse in Jer 20:16: "and that man will be like [וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא כִּי-] the cities / that Yahweh overthrew without pity." The Targum also likens MT's "salty land" (ארץ מלחה) in verse 6 to the "land of Sodom" (בְּאֶרֶץ סְדוֹם).¹³ The simile of the ערער in 1QH XVI, 25–27 is similarly set against a barren backdrop and similarly negatively charged: "But if I turn back my hand, it will become like a juniper [יְהִי כַעֲרֵר] [in the wilderness] and its trunk as nettles in a salty land and its irrigation ditches will produce thorns and thistles, briars and weeds ... like worthless trees.... Before the heat its leaves wither and are not restored with rain." It may be that the Qumran scribe has our passage in mind (perhaps also Jer 48:6). Still, the Qumran passage develops the visual component of the simile: *Juniperus phoenicea* has "needle-like" leaves early on and then more "scale-like" leaves as it matures, whereas the *Juniperus oxycedrus* has sharp triangular needles, hence it is known as the

11. Cf. Akkadian *idrānu* "alkali, potash" in "let alkali [*idrānu*] grow there instead of green vegetation" (BBSt. No. 7 ii 33 as cited in CAD 7:9b); also *eqel idrāni* "a field filled with salt/alkali" (Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996], 246 v 44).

12. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 44–54, 74–76.

13. The association of salt, inhospitality to vegetation, and Sodom and Gomorrah is explicit in Deut 29:22 and Zeph 2:9; see Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 74–76; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 350.

“prickly juniper.”¹⁴ So the detail in the Qumran passage is likely intended realistically, though some of the imagery is also traditional (e.g., Isa 5:6). In any case the negativity of the imagery is patent and even explicitly glossed: כַּעֲצֵי בְאוּשִׁים “like worthless trees.”

Perhaps as interesting, there follows in the next verse the image of a “forsaken man” (בְּאִישׁ נֶעֱזַב, 1QH XVI, 28), which is at least suggestive of a homophone of עֶרְעֵר, meaning “bare, naked, destitute” (Ps 102:18). If this latter lexeme was at all common, then it would literalize and thus name in its allusive play the plight of a גֶּבֶר so cursed: “destitute, bare.” Or perhaps as Robert P. Carroll suggests, knowledge of the root alone (cf. Jer 51:58) is sufficient to allow the idea of stripping or bareness to flutter by in the naming of the juniper, an עֶרְעֵר, “a tree stripped ... of its vegetation because of desert conditions.”¹⁵

In light of this imagery, it may be speculated that the inability of the גֶּבֶר/עֶרְעֵר to see “when ‘good’ [טוֹב lit. “good things,” i.e., not רָעָה “misfortune, calamity,” Jer 44:17; cf. Job 30:26] comes” is due to its/his location, literally and figuratively a “no man’s land” (cf. Job 38:26–27, viz. אֶרֶץ לֹא־אִישׁ // אִישׁ (מְדַבֵּר לֹא־אָדָם בּוֹ)—or, as in Isa 34:12, a “no kingdom there” (וְאֵין־שָׁם) (מְלוּכָה), a land better suited for the “wild ass” of Job 39:6. People cannot flourish in such a place. Even the juniper in 1QH XVI, which normally thrives in such a barren landscape (i.e., thorns, salty soil, extreme heat), is affected. Its leaves wither and “are not restored with rain” (וְלֹא נִפְתַּח עִם) (מָטָר, v. 27).¹⁶ The nature of human flourishing also seems to be one of the points in a short passage from Amen-em-Opet (4.6.1–12; see *ANET*, 422) that features similes contrasting two trees, one “growing in the open”¹⁷ and

14. See https://www.conifers.org/cu/Juniperus_phoenicea.php and https://www.conifers.org/cu/Juniperus_oxycedrus.php.

15. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 350. This is not a literal image, of course. There is also a treaty curse involving stripping like the stripping of a prostitute (Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 58–60). In KAI 222 A 40–41 the root ‘rr likely actually occurs. The imagery in the biblical versions of this curse (e.g., Nah 3:5; Jer 13:26–27) is more graphic and less verbally descriptive.

16. Whether the juniper’s inability to literally “see” is also due to its putative diminutive size remains a possibility (see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 357). There are juniper “bushes” that reach only 2–3 m in height (so “bush” in NRSV; cf. KJV “heath”). But juniper “trees” can be considerably taller as well, capable of reaching 8–12 m in height.

17. The “open” is associated with the noncultivated desert. The man likened to this tree is appropriately called “the heated man.”

the other “growing in a garden.” Both eventually die. What is important is the how and the where of the dying. The former dies in a “moment,” losing its “foliage,” and winds up as lumber in a shipyard and floated “far from its place.” The latter tree, the tree “growing in a garden,” in contrast, “flourishes,” “doubles its yield,” and when “its end is reached” it remains there “in the garden.” To see “good” for a human being is to be “sated with bread” (Jer 44:17), to take pleasure in all “toil” (Qoh 2:24), and to have a full and long life (Pss 4:7; 34:13; Job 7:7; Qoh 2:3). To see “good” all the days of one’s life is Yahweh’s blessing (Ps 128:5; cf. Ps 133:3), a “blessing of good” (Prov 24:25), and thus to “not see when good comes” is precisely a curse.

The lack of a conjunctive *waw* heading the final line of the initial stanza mildly mimes the barrenness of the landscape just imagined and offers a gesture of closure—a change-up from the preceding string of *waw*-headed lines—and signals the beginning of something new, as the opening line of the blessing in verse 7 is also unmarked by the conjunction (in MT).¹⁸ The auditor is immediately struck by the near repetition of language as the first line of the blessing mimes that of the curse:

ארור הגבר אשר יבטח באדם
ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח ביהוה

Cursed be the man who trusts in humanity
Blessed be the man who trusts in Yahweh.

The miming here is most literal. Although similarly phrased written curses abound (relatively speaking), not so for the blessing. There are no blessings elsewhere with this pattern of phrasing. This at least indicates something of how the saying was composed, building out from the curse. In fact, this second section hangs together as a whole in large part through the parallels it forms with the first, not only in the phrasing of the blessing but also in the fact and phrasing of another arboreal simile, the notice of the absence of fear, which so obviously plays on the absence of vision noticed earlier, and the string of lines headed by conjunctive *waw*, this time unbroken throughout (after the opening line).

This parallelism and the sense of holism it helps to impart compensates (again in part) for the less connectively sonic phrasing. There is nothing

18. LXX’s καὶ at the head of v. 7, by contrast, minimizes the force of juncture here and emphasizes the sense of overall continuity.

here to match the consonance with syllable-closing *resh* that pervades the first stanza. But this section, because of its strong dependence on parallelism at a structural level, also does not need to lean so heavily on sound to help hold the language material together. The integrity (and thus identity) of the two stanzas by poem's end are not in doubt, even though they are realized in slightly different ways. Further, because of this pervasive parallelism, neither is there much doubt about the unity of the larger poem itself: the iteration at the heart of the trope points back incessantly to that which is iterated and thus establishes identity—recall, as well, the commonality with which blessing and curse are paired, especially in Jeremiah (e.g., 20:14).

The blessing here is very much enacted to the same end as the curse: to motivate behavior (i.e., trust in Yahweh)—and hence another kind of paralleling. Blessing does not oppose cursing (so Pss 37:22; 62:5; 109:28) but joins forces with it, and the beneficence that is at the heart of all blessings here receives an added bit of cultural backup by being associated explicitly with Yahweh, the culture's paradigmatic purveyor of that “good” put at issue in verse 6 (e.g., *והנה טוב מאד*, Gen 1:31; cf. Pss 4:7; 34:13; Job 7:7). Indeed, this is doubled to good effect in the second line of verse 7, as both Yahweh and trust are repeated: *והיה יהוה מבטחו* “and Yahweh is his ‘trust’”—rhetorically, the arithmetic is anything but “weak.”¹⁹ This redoubled “trust” (*מבטח*) adds notes of safety and security, like that of a stronghold or superior military force (Prov 21:22; Ezek 29:16; Isa 32:18), images that flicker allusively in the afterwash of the earlier mention of the *גבר* readying “his arm,” his “arming.” The “arm” as Yahweh's weapon par excellence, as noted, also is elicited retrospectively in the deity's naming, and thus a fine point is put on the problem with the *גבר* trusting in his own “enfleshed” arm: it is not the “arm” of Yahweh. The line-ending /ō/ of the third masculine singular suffix (in the Tiberian vocalization), as it echoes (however faintly) the other two line-ending suffixal /ō/s in the opening triplet, shapes sound toward the support of such a solicitation.

The first line of verse 8, *והיה כעץ שתול על-מים* “and he will be like a tree planted beside water,” is a close version of a line (esp. in Aleppo) also found in Ps 1:3, *והיה כעץ שתול על-פלגי מים* “and he will be like a tree planted beside streams of water.” Though the putative direction of influence has long been debated, nothing in either text requires priority. What

19. Contra Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, HAT 1/12 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 114.

may be said most positively is that the scroll that contains the “words” attributed to Jeremiah evinces familiarity with and affinity for psalmic forms, diction, and phrasing.²⁰ Jeremiah 10:25 even offers a close version of lines that again are also preserved in a psalm (Ps 79:6–7). The variations (and even elaboration in 10:25) in both sets is wholly unexceptional in an environment so overwhelmingly oral in nature. That is, whatever the specific mode of composition in any of these instances and while recognizing the culture’s increasing use of texts at the time, it remains more than likely that the lines in question have human memory as their chief source (perhaps aided by writing at some point).²¹ So the thought that the speaker of the poem (Jeremiah) in 17:8 is quoting a line remembered from one psalm or another is in no way unreasonable, whether or not that psalm also happens to be *the* psalm preserved in the MT Psalter as Ps 1.²² Moreover, neither text seems to be alluding to the other, as Jerome F. D. Creach well observes.²³ The poems are entirely different: in their structures, poetics, language.²⁴ Even their developments of the image of the well-watered

20. So esp. William L. Holladay, “Indications of Jeremiah’s Psalter,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 245–61.

21. David M. Carr (*The Formation of the Hebrew Bible* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], esp. 13–36) talks about “memory variants,” building on the ideas of M. Parry. The situation may have been more complex than even Carr supposes. Still, it is clear that we will need to conceptualize notions of orality and textuality that imagine these as intersecting and overlapping forces in Judahite culture. In the instance of mostly short nonnarrative psalm texts, it is most probable that memory, at least originally, is the chief support for performance. Deuteronomy 32 (cf. 31:19–21, 30) provides a concrete example of the likely outer limits of what was memorizable, in this case specifically with the aid of writing (if we take the text at face value). At the very least tacit assumptions about the very reality of literary influence—Did it exist? How?—need specifying, problematizing, theorizing.

22. James A. Durlesser (“Poetic Style in Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5–8: A Rhetorical Critical Study,” *Semiotics* 9 [1984]: 30–48) and Jerome F. D. Creach (“Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: The Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3,” *CBQ* 61 [1999]: 34–46, esp. 39) problematize the question of dependence in light of the traditional nature of the imagery involved—although both scholars continue to operate with the idea of written literature uppermost in mind.

23. “Like a Tree,” 37; cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 351.

24. The formulaic curse language (אָרֹר) is not psalmic, and despite the apparent semantic overlap between the אֲשֶׁרִי (“happy is...”) and בְּרוּךְ (“blessed is...”) phrases, the two are not used together or in parallel, nor is the former paired with curses.

and cultivated fruit tree itself are quite distinct and eventually put to very different poetic ends, as any close inspection will reveal:

Ps 1:2	Jer 17:8
והיה כעץ שתול על-פליג מים	והיה כעץ שתול על-מים
אשר פריו יתן בעתו	ועל-יובל ישלח שרשיו
ועלהו לא-יבול	ולא ירא כ-יבא חם
וכל אשר-יעשה יצלח	והיה עלהו רענן
	ובשנת בצרת לא ידאג
	ולא ימיש מעשות פרי

There are differences in the lengths of the passages, in their pattern of lineation, and in their ultimate semantic uptake. If the Jeremiah passage is recalling a psalm text more like Ps 1, then perhaps what triggers the selection of the rare יובל “canal, channel, stream” (cf. Isa 30:25; 44:4; Sir 50:8) are the sonic impressions left by יבול “it will not wither” (Ps 1:3). But the former can hardly be said to be alluding to the latter.²⁵ The two lines והיה רענן “and its leaf will be verdant” (Jer 17:8) and ועלהו לא-יבול “and its leaf will not whither” (Ps 1:3) share the lexeme עלה “leaf” and are generally equivalent in length (eight/seven syllables) and implication (cf. Prov 11:28), but otherwise they are quite unlike: the psalmic line is most conventional in its imagery (cf. Isa 1:30; 34:4; 64:5; Jer 8:13; Ezek 47:12).

Finally, there are plenty of other examples, especially in biblical narrative, of the quotation of remembered bits of verse, what Edward L. Greenstein calls “snatches,” after the Arabic term for such poetic fragments (Arabic *qitʿa*; e.g., Gen 4:23; Num 17–18; Josh 10:12).²⁶ It is almost always the case that these remembered “snatches” come packaged as couplets or triplets (or combinations thereof), like Jer 10:25, no doubt reflecting the dominantly di- and tristichic nature of biblical verse. What is remarkable about Jer 17:8 here is its recollection of a singular (isolated) line, providing

25. The parallelism of the initial couplet and the structure of the passage as a whole work against eliciting such an allusion. Further, what would such an allusion achieve? Roots that reach their water source are crucial to “not withering,” but that much is explicitly said in the Jeremiah passage itself. So nothing is really gained from a posited allusion.

26. “Signs of Poetry Past: Literariness in Pre-biblical Hebrew Literature” (unpublished manuscript).

another kind of impressive evidence for the facticity of the poetic line in biblical verse.²⁷

The image of a well-watered fruit tree itself is buoyant and beatific, as its appearance in Ps 1 makes clear (cf. Jer 11:16; Ezek 19:10; Ps 52:8; 92:12–14; *ANET*, 422), and thus its central place in the simile in the Jeremiah blessing is not surprising. This symbol of beneficence is further supported by its containment within a blessing (a genre that cross-culturally is normally positively charged; cf. Job 1:5; 2:9) and its double association with trust in Yahweh and the “safety, security” (מבטח; see Isa 32:18; Ezek 29:16; Prov 21:22) that such trust brings. The fruit tree, like the juniper earlier, stands in the auditor’s imagination, rooted in the language of the poem. Both survive (in language)—the juniper, in fact, is well known most especially for its capacity to live long in the harshest of conditions (contrast the trees in Amen-em-Opet’s similes that finally die). What distinguishes these trees above all is where they are imagined and the nature of the survival implied. The lonely juniper, out there somewhere in the wild Arabah, set against a bleak tableau of dusty browns and tans, parched sands, surviving but not thriving—no “good” to be seen here. This contrasts with the lush hues of verdant greens and blues and splashes of fruit from a tree intentionally “planted” (esp. Ezek 17:22), rooted amidst the life-giving gurgle of ample water,²⁸ where “heat” is not to be feared and indeed where “good” may be expected, anticipated, “seen” (esp. Pss 4:7; 34:13; Job 7:7). The two figured trees in their tree-ness coerce auditors into holding the images together and thereby allow the contrasting tableaux painted in this word art to emerge in the mind’s eye—or in a hyper-scribal figure for memory, to be written on “the tablet of the heart” (cf. Jer 17:1).

The third line in the simile in verse 8 restages another line from the opening curse stanza:

ולא יראה כִּי־בוא טוב
ולא ירא כִּי־בא חם

and will not see when good comes
and will not fear when heat comes

27. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “‘Verse Properly So Called’: The Line in Biblical Poetry,” in *On Biblical Poetry*, 14–94.

28. Such ampleness is one consequence of the iteration at the heart of parallelism and, in this instance, also of how that iteration is staged, one mention of water piling up “upon” and right next to (“beside”) another: ועל־יובל/על־מים.

The repetition of wording and syntactic frames makes it easy to associate the lines and also makes sure the two pairs of differences are noticed: *ירא/יראה* and *חם/טוב*. The /o/ sounds in the second pair ever so faintly (since there is not much reinforcement of this soundplay in the immediate context) quickens the words' associations. The negative framing of the lines allows each to be used out of context, so to speak, but in so doing to recall/anticipate that context and to underscore its lack in the current context. "Good" is associated with blessing (e.g., Gen 26:29; Deut 8:10; Prov 22:9), and its lack is by that nature a curse. On the contrary, the mention of "heat" in verse 8 can only point back to the parched context of the curse itself. To not fear such heat—especially "in a year of drought" (*בשנת בצרת*)—is a blessing indeed. The first pair (reading with the *ketiv*)²⁹ enacts a play between the roots *ראה* "to see" and *ירא* "to fear," a play attested elsewhere in biblical poetry (esp. Ps 112:8; cf. Zech 9:5; Pss 40:4; 52:8; Job 6:21; 37:24). In fact, the *qere* and Targum, in their pointing and translation as if a form of the earlier verb "to see," make the force of the play visible. Such plays (among other things) are intended to point to another context by which to layer additional meanings and there is no doubt that the *qere* and Targum have that earlier line in verse 6 in view. Given the peculiar (abbreviated) writing and the lack of an explicit play on sound here (e.g., contrast the chiming in *ויראו צדיקים ויראו* "the righteous will see and will be afraid," Ps 52:8), it may be that this play is partially informed by writing, whether or not this particular poem was originally composed in writing. That is, this kind of root play becomes more striking as a visual trope, that is, at a point which the language is given spatial substance. In this instance, what is striking is the repetition of the sequence of letters *ולא ירא* in both lines and not how those letters then score the language performance (how they are sounded when read out loud). Composition in writing is not crucial here, but exposure to writing is. Thus perhaps one other small place where this specimen of Jeremican poetic art may be seen to be inscribed with an awareness of the phenomenon of writing.

The two negated clauses in the curse stanza (*לא תשוב, לא יראה*) signify straightforwardly, that is, negatively. The blessing effected turns out to be an antidote for such negativity, just as blessings are commonly

29. So LXX *φοβηθήσεται*, Vulgate *timebit*, Syriac *ndhl*. The *qere* reads as *יראה* "he will see" (so too Targum *יחי*). The use of *דאג* "to worry, fret," which elsewhere is also used synonymously with *ירא* "to fear" (Jer 42:16; Isa 57:1), leaves little doubt that the *ketiv* is the reading here.

used to deflect the force of a curse. The negated clauses in the blessing stanza—three instead of two (לֹא יִרָא, לֹא יִדְאָג, לֹא יִמָּש)—all hold positive implications: not fearing, not worrying, not ceasing. The increase from two to three adds an extra bit of heft to the blessing. This added weighting of the blessing is signaled as well in the additional couplet given to the fruit tree simile. So if the blocks of curse and blessing present themselves relatively evenly, there are numerical advantages allocated to the blessing stanza that, however nuanced, can be felt rhetorically. Semantics also plays its role, and thus the way in which the stanza closes is likely not accidental. The last of these positively charged negated clauses offers one final splash of verdant color against the dusty drought washed hues of the desert: the promise of an unceasing fruitfulness, a resounding Deuteronomic note on which to close the poem, an echo of the blessing of the fruit of the womb and the fruit of the ground—of grain, wine and oil, of cattle and sheep (Deut 7:13; 28:4). To “make fruit” (פָּרַי + עָשָׂה) is literally what fruit trees do (e.g., Gen 1:11, 12; cf. Ezek 17:8, 23; Ps 1:3), but such making in the southern Levant also is at the same time necessarily a making—cultivation—of the farmer (Ps 107:37; cf. Jer 12:2; Amos 9:14; Qoh 2:5). Therefore to “make fruit” can become a figure of human flourishing (2 Kgs 19:30; Isa 37:31) and then even get reliteralized; that is, bearing fruit equates to bearing children (Hos 9:1; cf. Deut 7:13).

The uninhabitable landscape at the end of the curse—literally a salted, barren, unproductive land uninhabitable by any גִּבּוֹר—here at the end of verse 8 is redeemed in blessing, now teeming with unceasing fruitfulness—both of a tree and of a man—that only trust in Yahweh can ensure, Yahweh as storm-god and divine farmer, bringer of good fruit and good life.

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Seductive Speech and Double Voice in Proverbs 7 and Song of Songs

J. Cheryl Exum

Parallels between Prov 7 and Song of Songs are widely recognized. They have vocabulary and themes in common, such as the sexual desire and boldness of the woman, the night-time seeking in the streets and squares leading to the finding, seizing and kissing of the man, the enhancement of lovemaking with exotic spices (myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon), and the conflict between eros and thanatos, among others.¹ Two features shared by Prov 7 and the Song of Songs are my focus here: the attribution of seductive speech to a woman, a relative rarity in biblical literature; and the use of a double narratorial voice, the latter a particularly striking, artistically sophisticated feature from a literary point of view. In conclusion I offer

1. Daniel Grossberg, "Two Kinds of Sexual Relationships in the Hebrew Bible," *HS* 35 (1994): 7–25; Martin Paul, "Die 'fremde Frau' in Sprichwörter 1–9 und die 'Geliebte' des Hohenliedes: Ein Beitrag zur Intertextualität," *BN* 106 (2001): 40–46; Massimo Gargiulo, "Which Parent Is the Best Teacher? About Teaching Wisdom and Love in Proverbs I–IX and the Song of Songs," *RSO* 78 (2004): 49–55; Kathryn Imray, "Love Is (Strong as) Death: Reading the Song of Songs through Proverbs 1–9," *CBQ* 75 (2013): 649–65; Daphna V. Arbel, "'The Most Beautiful Woman,' 'Woman Wisdom,' and 'the Other Woman': On Femininity in the Song of Songs," in *Poets, Prophets, and Texts in Play: Studies in Biblical Poetry and Prophecy in Honour of Francis Landy*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi et al., *LHBOTS* 597 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 125–40; Annette Schellenberg, "'May Her Breasts Satisfy You at All Times' (Prov 5:19)," *VT* 68 (2018): 252–71. Often it is question of dependence of one text on the other; it is equally likely that both draw upon a common tradition of ancient Near Eastern love poetry, of which other Hebrew examples have not been preserved. If the Song is "the best of songs," one assumes there were others with which to compare it.

some reflections on how these texts employ persuasive rhetoric to establish a relationship between their characters and their audience.²

The Song consists entirely of direct speech. Two voices, a man's and a woman's, are joined only occasionally by a third voice, that of the women of Jerusalem. The poet is so skillfully effaced that the voices of the lovers seem to reach us unmediated, creating the impression that we are overhearing the characters and witnessing their love as it unfolds. Proverbs 7 is a monologue in which the poet is also effaced, yet in this case it is fair to say that, although it appears as though the father is speaking directly to us, the father serves as spokesperson for the poet.³ The father who offers advice to his son in Proverbs and the woman who speaks so amorously to her lover in the Song of Songs are personae created by the poets (in the case of Proverbs we may confidently assume a male poet, and this may be the case in Song of Songs as well). In Prov 7 the poet puts words in the father's mouth, creating his speech, and the father character puts words in the Other Woman's mouth, creating her speech, a speech that proves to be irresistibly seductive (7:21).⁴ In the Song the poet puts words in the

2. It is a pleasure to contribute to this volume honoring my friend Ed Greenstein for his many contributions to biblical studies, among which I particularly value his sagacious pragmatic reading of texts, an approach he describes with characteristic perspicacity in Edward L. Greenstein, "Reading Pragmatically: Interpreting the Binding of Isaac," in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, HBM 40 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 102–32.

3. So most commentators; the presence of a female voice (the mother's) has been posited, especially by feminist critics, e.g., Athalya Brenner and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, BibInt 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 57–62, 113–30; Alice Ogden Bellis, "The Gender and Motives of the Wisdom Teacher in Proverbs 7," in *Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, FCB 2/2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 79–91; and Christl Maier, "Conflicting Attractions: Parental Wisdom and the 'Strange Woman' in Proverbs 1–9," in Brenner and Fontaine, *Wisdom and Psalms*, 92–108; however, the voice, in any case, is the voice of patriarchy. Unlike the poet of Prov 7, who is identified with the father character, the Song of Songs poet is not identified with one of the characters in the poem.

4. Following, among others, Gale A. Yee (*Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 135–36) and Athalya Brenner ("Proverbs 1–9: An F Voice?" in Brenner and Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 121–23), I refer to this woman as the "Other Woman." The identity of this figure has been widely discussed elsewhere and is beyond the scope of the present

mouth of a woman, and she, on two occasions, puts seductive speeches in her lover's mouth. The situations are different, but the phenomenon itself merits attention.

Proverbs 7:14–20 and Song 7:12–14:
Seductive Speech Attributed to Women

What is seductive speech? I shall not attempt a precise definition. Whereas the term is often used pejoratively, in the sense of leading someone astray, in the course of this essay I shall be using it more broadly as speech that is “alluring, enticing, winning,”⁵ and I use it loosely to refer to persuasive speech in general. In the two examples below, “seductive speech” applies more narrowly to invitations to lovemaking addressed to a man by a woman. On the basis of behavioral norms we can construct from the rest of the Bible, these are daring speeches for a woman to make.

Prov 7:14–20⁶

I had to offer well-being sacrifices,
today I fulfilled my vows;⁷
Therefore I have come out to meet you,
to seek you out, and I have found you.
I have decked my couch with covers
of dyed Egyptian linen;
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let us have our fill of lovemaking until morning;
let us revel in displays of love.
For the man is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.

essay; especially helpful from both an ideological and sociohistorical perspective are Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 135–58; Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Other Woman and the Making of the Bible*, GCT 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 40–71; Maier, “Conflicting Attractions.”

5. A definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary.

6. Translations from the Hebrew in this essay are mine.

7. Some give the verb a modal meaning (“I am going to fulfill my vow”); e.g., William McKane, *Proverbs*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 221, 337; Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 88–89. Clifford proposes that this is her meaning and the young man himself is the intended offering, but the simpleton interprets her words as past action, indicating that a feast is ready.

He took a bag of money with him;
 he will not come home until full moon.

Song 7:12–14 [Eng 11–13]

Come, my love, let's go out to the open field,
 spend the night among the henna blossoms.

Let's go early to the vineyards;
 we'll see if the vine has budded,
 if the grape blossoms have opened,
 if the pomegranates have bloomed.
 There I will give you my love.

The mandragoras give off fragrance,
 and at our doors are all choice fruits,
 new as well as old.

I have stored them up for you, my love.

Song 7:12–14 is rather exceptional in the Song. Only this once does the woman address her lover with a speech of invitation anything like the words of the Other Woman in Prov 7, even though elsewhere she frequently takes the initiative in love, for example, searching for her lover in the city streets, bringing him to her mother's chamber, where lovemaking will presumably take place, and affirming their mutual commitment (2:16; 6:3). In 4:16 she invites him to enter his garden (the woman herself) and enjoy its choice fruits; however, her words here are a response triggered by his passionate description of her as a garden of erotic delights (4:12–15). In comparison, 7:12–14 appears unprompted and, unlike 4:16, can stand on its own.⁸

In 7:12–14, as throughout the Song, the words of the woman are represented by the poet as direct speech, as though they were her own. The Other Woman of Proverbs, in contrast, does not speak in her own right. She is a fiction created by the father character, who claims to have heard her and seen her in the dark of night from his window above and who, moreover, has intimate knowledge about her nature. William McKane observes that the speaker's account of the young man's encounter with the

8. Song 7:11–14 can be understood as the woman's reply to the man's metaphor of possessing her in 7:7–10 or as a more discrete speech that could be taken on its own; see J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 40–41, 240–41.

woman “affords greater imaginative and descriptive scope” than the more prosaic instruction elsewhere in Proverbs:

Here the teacher does not assert his authority prosaically in imperatives, nor does he argue in motive clauses that his demands are reasonable and should be obeyed. Rather, he relies on his descriptive powers and his ability to reconstruct imaginatively the woman’s stratagems and seductive conversation.⁹

To be more precise, the woman’s speech is not *reconstructed* imaginatively but rather *constructed* ingeniously by the poet, using the father’s voice. The father-character reports that the woman “makes her words smooth” (אִמְרֵיהָ הַחֲלִיקָה, 7:5), when in fact the seductive and flattering words are his. It is he who speaks persuasively, using the speech he provides for the woman and the behavior he attributes to her to convince his son(s) that father knows best and that observing his instruction is imperative.

Commentators are generally agreed that the story is fictitious and that the details render it suspect. Does the father make a practice of watching from his window for misdemeanors?¹⁰ How does he know that the woman habitually roams about the city and lies in wait at every corner? Although the father character is an unreliable narrator, the eyewitness report we are given in these verses lends, as Michael Fox observes, “heightened validity and authenticity” to the father’s observations:

We are invited to join in the narrator’s voyeurism as he peers out the window on the dark street. Through his eyes we see the furtive assignation, and through his ears we hear the woman’s lush and lewd inveiglements.¹¹

Both women are archetypes. The woman in the Song is a composite figure. She has been described as an amalgam of the two female types, good woman/Woman Wisdom and bad woman/Folly, of Prov 1–9.¹² Identified neither by name nor by association with any particular time

9. McKane, *Proverbs*, 332.

10. Michael V. Fox takes נִשְׁקָפְתִּי as indicating extended watching, which “suggests that the speaker was spending time peering down from his upper-story window” (*Proverbs 1–9*, AB 18A [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 242).

11. *Proverbs 1–9*, 252.

12. Imray, “Love Is (Strong as) Death”; Arbel, “Most Beautiful Woman.”

or place (except for vague connections to Solomon and Jerusalem), the woman and her lover are types of lovers rather than any specific lovers. Because the poet offers readers access to only their voices, to what they say not who they are, they can easily be identified with any and all lovers. The woman appears as herself as well as in various guises. She is a member of the royal court and an outsider who tends vineyards or keeps sheep. She is black (1:5), as well as like the white moon and radiant sun (6:10), with a neck like an ivory tower (7:5). The Other Woman in Proverbs is also a composite figure, larger than life.¹³ She personifies all that the patriarchal psyche finds most threatening, and paradoxically desirable, about real women: sensual and desirous (2:16–17; 7:10–18), risky (“stolen water is sweet,” 9:17), beauty that arouses desire and lips that drip honey, like the woman of the Song of Songs (6:25; 5:3; cf. Song 6:4–5; 4:11). Claudia Camp describes her as “consolidating a variety of images of female-identified evil into an archetype of disorder at all levels of existence.”¹⁴ Gale Yee finds her “mythically awesome,” “the evil antithesis of Woman Wisdom personified.”¹⁵

The women may be archetypes, but at the same time they seem to take on distinct personalities, giving us the impression that we know them to some extent as individuals. In the Song the woman’s “personality,” such as it is, emerges in the course of the poem, where we learn how she views herself, how she feels about her lover, and how being in love affects her.¹⁶ Already in Prov 2:16–19, 5:3–23, and 6:20–35 the son was warned about the threat posed to the patriarchal order by the honey-tongued, duplicitous Other Woman. By means of the speech placed in her mouth in Prov 7 she comes to life. She is not as fully developed as the woman in the Song, but nevertheless speech confers a degree of subjectivity, even if it is a subjectivity constructed for her by the father character.¹⁷ A reader might,

13. On the woman as a composite figure with various epithets, see Christine Roy Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31*, BZAW 304 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 73–74 n. 2.

14. *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 43; see also 62–66.

15. *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 135.

16. She is faint with love, or lovesick, a condition of intense longing for which her lover is both cause and cure (2:5; 5:8).

17. Robert Alter sees here a fusion of generality and concreteness: “The woman here is the general type, seductress, but she also is made to speak and act with a persuasive distinctiveness of presence” (*The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], 58). Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 253–54, for whom she is “endowed with

for example, conclude with Fox that she is “driven by a need deeper than physical desire.”¹⁸

Fox argues that the identification of the אשה זרה and נכריה as another man’s wife is the only correct one.¹⁹ In the passages in which the figure appears, the father’s chief concern is adultery, and his warnings are aimed at protecting a man’s property against other men. If adulteresses lurk on every street corner and in every square, one wonders where all the husbands are. The threat that the speaker constructs has epic proportions: the Other Woman’s victims are countless, and none who go with her return, for her house is a gate to Sheol (2:19; 7:26–27). What Fox rules out and what feminist critics have stressed is the Other Woman’s symbolic value beyond the merely human.²⁰ She is both adulteress and archetype in the same character. As Carol Newsom argues, she is the quintessential other:

Much ink has been spilled in attempting to clarify why she is identified as a “strange” or “foreign” woman, whether the terms refer to an ethnic, legal, or social status. But it may not be an either/or question. Whether the terms were originally ambiguous or have only become so after the passage of years, any and all of the possible interpretations underscore the quality of otherness that she already possesses as woman in male discourse.²¹

The outspoken invitations to lovemaking in Prov 7:18 and Song 7:12–13 [Eng 11–12] provide the strongest similarities between the speeches:

some suggestion of feelings and motives” that contrasts with the father’s abstract characterization of her as “the paradigm of all adulterous tempters.”

18. *Proverbs 1–9*, 253.

19. *Proverbs 1–9*, 134–41, 253–63; for a different view, see Brenner, “Proverbs 1–9,” 124; Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, *The ‘Foreignness’ of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif*, BZAW 381 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 81–105. Brenner wonders if “the man” (v. 19) might be a male relative and custodian rather than the husband; Tan suggests that “the man” is used to avoid disclosing explicitly whether or not the woman has a husband (99).

20. Fox acknowledges that in 7:26–27 she is described in “nearly superhuman terms” (*Proverbs 1–9*, 253).

21. Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 142–60, here 148; cf. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 53–54; Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 136; Camp, *Ben Sira and the Men Who Handle Books: Gender and the Rise of Canon-Consciousness*, HBM 50 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 123–26; Maier, “Conflicting Attractions,” 99.

“Come, let us have our fill of lovemaking until morning; let us revel in displays of love”; “Come, my love, let’s go out to the open field.... There I will give you my love.” Although the context determines the way we read them, the speeches themselves already hint at the differences between the women that the larger context reveals. The poet has the father character use the effective technique of not only repeatedly maligning the Other Woman in his direct speech to his son but also of having what are ostensibly her own words accuse her of being devious and dangerous. The poet has artfully constructed the father’s speech:

- A warnings about the dangerous woman addressed to “my son,” vv. 1–5
- B the encounter: a vulnerable young man and the adulteress, vv. 6–13
- C the woman speaks, vv. 14–20
- B’ the outcome of the encounter, vv. 21–23
- A’ warnings about the woman, addressed to “sons,” vv. 24–27

The beginning (v. 14) and end (vv. 19–20) of the woman’s speech turn the speech into what could serve as a judgment against her.²² Why does she mention sacrifices rather than saying simply, “I have decked my table”?²³ Food and sex are often associated, especially in the Song of Songs.²⁴ The Other Woman invites the young man to a fine meal as a prelude to sex, but her reference to sacrifices and vows raises questions. Is she making a pretense of piety?²⁵ Is ritual impropriety involved?²⁶ It is not stated but

22. Cf. Tan (*The ‘Foreignness’ of the Foreign Woman*, 97–99), who remarks that the religious note in v. 14 is unexpected and only in v. 19 might the youth recognize signs of danger.

23. As Keith Bodner notes, she does not explicitly mention a meal, which “allows the lad’s imagination free rein to contemplate the fare of this feast” (*The Artistic Dimension: Literary Explorations of the Hebrew Bible*, LHBOTS 590 [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 123).

24. See Christopher Meredith, “‘Eating Sex’ and the Unlovely Song of Songs: Reading Consumption, Excretion and D. H. Lawrence,” *JSOT* 42 (2018): 341–62.

25. E.g., Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 246; Bodner, *Artistic Dimension*, 123. It is hard to see why being religious would make the woman appear desirable to the young man rather than, for example, making him think twice about his own religious attitude.

26. The nature of the vows and offerings has received considerable scholarly attention; Camp, for example, proposes that what is involved is not only the immorality of

need only be insinuated in order to discredit the woman. Her statement that the man of the house will be away for some time offers assurance to the young man that he will not be discovered and thus suffer the consequences of adultery elaborated just before this episode (6:23–35). But why draw the youth's attention to the deed by placing so much emphasis on her husband's absence?²⁷ Whereas in Song 7 readers are left to imagine the success of seductive speech, in Prov 7 seductive speech achieves its goal—the young man is entrapped—but the rhetoric of persuasion is used against the speaker. It is easy for the reader to condemn one woman and not the other.²⁸

Double Voice in Proverbs 7 and Song 2:8–17 and 5:2–8

The situation we find in Prov 7, where the poet puts words in the mouth of a character (the father), who then puts seductive speech into the mouth of another character (the adulteress), occurs in two places in the Song of Songs. The poet puts words into the female protagonist's mouth, creating her speech (2:8–17 and 5:2–8), in which she puts words into the male protagonist's mouth, creating his delicately phrased seductive speech (2:10–14; 5:2bc).²⁹ When the woman quotes her lover, it is as if we are overhearing him, so unobtrusive is the double narratorial voice, the poet telling us what the woman is telling us that the man is saying. In Proverbs, even though it is more apparent that the father character is creating not only the words of the Other Woman but also the character herself, the speech placed in her mouth gives the appearance of offering direct access to her words.³⁰

defiling herself and the youth with sex during the period of feasting but also the possibility that the woman has paid or will pay her vow to the temple with the “hire of a harlot” (*Wise, Strange and Holy*, 45–47).

27. Cf. Johnny E. Miles, *Wise King—Royal Fool: Semiotics, Satire and Proverbs 1–9*, JSOTSup 399 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 82: “the lengthy statement of her husband's absence and her insistence intended to allay the nervousness of this young lad are a bit over the top.”

28. See, e.g., Fox's comments comparing the two women (*Proverbs 1–9*, 245). Clifford (*Proverbs*, 86–87) considers Song of Songs to be the ideal against which the Other Woman is judged.

29. In 2:10–14 he invites her outside to enjoy the spring, but what he really wants is to see and hear her; in 5:2 he asks her to admit him to her chamber because it is wet outside, but that is not the real reason.

30. Alan Moss (*Proverbs, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015], 41), for example, concludes, “The teacher has positioned himself

Proverbs 7:6 and Song 2:8–14 set the stage by presenting the speakers as looking from the window of their houses and constructing speech for the character they say they have seen.³¹ Both speakers draw attention to the scene unfolding before us—"Look!" (הנה, Prov 1:10; Song 2:8)—and both make it seem as though we are overhearing the characters they are looking at. Through putting words in the mouths of the characters they see (the Other Woman, the male lover), the speakers control the way we view them. The adulteress is forthright about her intentions and does not conceal her marital status. But she does appear to dissemble when she tells the callow youth that she has been searching for him.³² In the Song of Songs, the woman presents her lover to us as a romantic suitor who comes courting by day and by night and woos her with sweet words—and as a somewhat elusive lover she must seek (2:8–3:5; 5:2–6:3).

The picture the woman presents of her lover, however, is not the picture we get of him from the words the poet places in his mouth. In his speeches, the man does not portray himself as a romantic suitor or as a suitor whose availability can be unpredictable. He does not so much court the woman as flatter and enjoy her. For the most part, he looks at her, tells her what he sees (typically in densely metaphorical language), and describes the feelings she arouses in him: he is devastated by a glance (4:9), overwhelmed by her gaze (6:5), held captive by her tresses (7:6). He desires her (4:6) and praises her lovemaking (4:10) and the erotic pleasures her body offers (4:12–5:1; 7:8–10). The closest he comes to the seductive invitations she attributes to him is "Come with me from Lebanon ... from the dens of lions, from the lairs of leopards" (4:8), a summons that lacks the romantic timbre and playful indirection that makes the speeches she ascribes to him so appealing.

so that every word the temptress says can be heard and reported." It is hard to see how. See also Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 103: "The father tells of an occasion when he actually observed a young man being seduced by an adulteress. He saw it all as he looked out his window, and he had no doubt about what was transpiring."

31. Song 2:8–14 does not state that the woman is looking from her window, but this is the position implied for her from which she sees the man approaching from afar, then standing outside looking in (to catch a glimpse of her?), then calling for her to come outside. In 5:2 she is also inside when he comes calling, entreating her to let him in.

32. So most commentators. Alter (*Art of Biblical Poetry*, 58) sees their encounter as an "assignation"; similarly Miles, *Wise King*, 76–77.

The differences between the man as the poet portrays him and the man as the poet has the woman portray him raise an interesting question. What if, in the Song of Songs, we had a situation comparable to that in Prov 7? If the Song consisted of the words of only one character, the woman, we might wonder if the man is a fantasy lover, a dream lover the woman has conjured up for herself (in other words, a fiction, like Proverbs' Other Woman). In any event, we would know very little about the man, and we certainly would not construe him in the same way that we do when we read the entire poem. I am not suggesting that the woman in the Song of Songs is an unreliable narrator. What I am arguing is that, from a narratological point of view, the differences between the speeches the poet gives the man and the speeches the woman ascribes to him should not be ignored. Among other things, they illustrate the poet's skill in portraying the lovers as speaking about love from different, gendered points of view. The differences may not be substantial, but they reveal that the lovers do not look at love or at each other in quite the same way.³³

Double voice is used creatively by the poet of Proverbs not only in chapter 7 but also at the beginning of his instruction in 1:8–19. Here, too, the son is warned against keeping the wrong company, in this case against consorting with evil men. The father character quotes the reprobates in verses 11–14, but, unlike the example of the Other Woman, the father does not claim to have witnessed the deeds of these men or heard their words. Their words are hypothetical (“If they say...” [םא], v. 11). A double narratorial voice also appears in 4:3–9, where the father character relates what his father taught him (an encouragement to the son to aspire to be in the father position one day). Significantly, the father ascribes seductive speech not only to the Other Woman but also to her counterpart, the worthy object of desire, personified Wisdom. The words of Wisdom, who is not a character in Prov 1–9 in the way the teacher and his silent addressees (the son or sons) are, are reported in 1:22–33, 8:4–36, and 9:4–11 by the speaker, whom I identify with the father. If we take 9:12–18 as a continuation of Wisdom's speech in 9:4–11, then we have a triple narratorial voice, the poet creating the speech of the father character, who creates the words spoken by personified Wisdom, who in verses 16–17 creates the speech of the foolish woman character (an aspect of the Other Woman archetype).³⁴

33. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 14–22 and passim.

34. Since it is sometimes difficult to determine when a speech within a speech ends, a triple narratorial voice here is conjectural.

Persuasive and Didactic Speech: The Poets and Their Audience

Both Prov 7 and the Song are didactic: one is obvious, the other subtle. Song 8:6–7 is, in the view of many scholars, the climax of the book, a powerful summation of its “message.”

Love is strong as death,
 jealousy as fierce as Sheol.
 Its flames are flames of fire,
 an almighty flame.
 Floods cannot quench love,
 nor rivers sweep it away.
 Should a man offer all his wealth for love,
 it would be utterly scorned.

These verses could easily be at home in Proverbs, but in Proverbs the sentiment they express would not be nearly so effective or affecting as it is in the Song, where it is the only didactic statement in the book. The Song of Songs does not preach directly to its readers about love. Only in these verses does the poet offer an observation about the nature of love in general, and, like everything else that is said in the poem, it appears in the mouth of one of the characters (not as the voice of the poet), and it is addressed to another character (and not directly to the reader, though its readers are the poem’s ultimate audience). In these verses the woman speaks to her lover not, as she has up until now, about their love, but about love itself. Elsewhere in the Song the poet prefers to show rather than tell the reader what love is like.

Whereas the Song makes no demands on its readers to accept its “message” about love, the speaker in Prov 1–9 address his readers directly with a message about seeking wisdom and avoiding the path of evil that he both urges and expects them to heed. The reader is placed in the position of the son, who is subordinate to the speaker. There are two characters in the story the father tells his son(s) in Prov 7: the naïve youth and the adulteress. The callow young man is an example of what happens when an “unsuspecting” man allows himself to be swayed by the seductive speech of an אשה זרה or נכריה.³⁵ “The focus of this lecture is the seduction itself,

35. The young man may be a simpleton, unsuspecting and foolish, but why does he take the road by the woman’s house (Bodner, *Artistic Dimension*, 119; Miles, *Wise King*, 76–77)?

whose powerful allure is described so that the reader may know what to beware of,” observes Fox, who vividly depicts how the lesson entraps the heterosexual male reader:

The audience (which is to say, the male reader who is the assumed audience of the book) is lured into imagining the erotic delights offered the youth in the story: the kisses, the banquet the woman has prepared, her silky plush bedding, the sensual intoxication of a night of sex, passed in deceptive security in the husband’s absence. The reader can surrender to fantasy, enjoy the titillation, relax into the vicarious eroticism, and imagine himself in that bed. Then, when his guard is down, reality slaps him in the face. He learns that the fool, whom the reader has joined in fancy, is actually lurching not to bliss but to butchery.³⁶

Feeling taken in “when his guard is down” may not be a reader’s only response. Some readers might feel from the start a sense of superiority to the hapless youth and congratulate themselves on their greater discernment while still enjoying the erotic scene. And what about the poet? He might well have taken pleasure in describing forbidden erotic delights while at the same time mastering desire and taking the moral high ground by repudiating the Other Woman.

The time- and culture-bound polemic of Proverbs is not likely to attract a wide modern readership.³⁷ Proverbs 1–9 so fiercely defends its worldview that it risks turning its ideal audience of obedient sons into resistant sons. The male reader is infantilized, placed in the position of an untutored youth, potentially fatally ignorant if he is not careful.³⁸ The son is passive. He does not speak, although, in additional examples of double voice, the father character puts words in his mouth, telling him what to say (7:4a) and predicting what he will say should he ignore his teachers’ warnings about the Other Woman (5:12–14). This is a position some male readers might not want to assume. Some might prefer to identify with the

36. *Proverbs 1–9*, 252.

37. As Tan observes (*‘Foreignness’ of the Foreign Woman*, 171), the negative meanings and xenophobic attitudes associated with “foreignness” and the Foreign Woman are “not congenial to a modern worldview.”

38. As Glenn D. Pemberton observes, “The rhetor attempts to frighten the son into submission by instilling in him a terror of the consequences of falling prey to the alien woman” (“The Rhetoric of the Father in Proverbs 1–9,” *JSOT* 30 [2005]: 78).

father, who has wisdom less experienced men lack; others might find the father too authoritarian for their taste.

The female reader of Prov 7 is excluded (except indirectly, by being given an example of how not to behave). Other female figures in Proverbs—the wife of one's youth (5:18), the capable wife/woman of substance (Prov 31), and personified Wisdom, who provides a way of controlling and channeling the son's desire where the father, speaking for patriarchal values, wants it—are, like the Other Woman, male constructs created to serve the ideological interests of the poet and his circle. These constructions tell us more about the men who created them, their concerns and values, fears and desires, than about women. All is not lost for the female reader, however. Claudia Camp's deconstruction of the binary opposition "strange woman/personified Wisdom," in which she reveals their shared traits as trickster figures, demonstrates how unstable and difficult to maintain the opposition is.³⁹

The appeal of the Song of Songs to readers over the centuries needs no documentation. The poet's refusal to situate the poem in a specific time or place or to identify its sentiments with particular lovers of the past enables and encourages readers to identify with them and accounts considerably for the Song's timelessness and universal appeal. The lovers may be a heterosexual couple, but this has not stopped readers from adopting its lyrics from whatever gender-identity perspective, if any, they choose. As centuries of allegorical interpretation have shown, male readers have had no difficulty in identifying themselves, individually and collectively, with the woman in the Song, and female readers are drawn to it, as the considerable attention it has attracted from feminist biblical critics testifies.⁴⁰ Fiona Black explores the Song's appeal to readers by casting it in the role of a skillful lover whose amatory techniques include the way it teases readers with tantalizingly opaque erotic imagery and its flirtation with a plot.⁴¹ As

39. *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 72–89; Arbel's reading functions similarly ("Most Beautiful Woman").

40. There has been a shift from overly sanguine claims about gender equality in the Song to more critical assessments, but interest in gender issues in the Song has not abated.

41. Fiona C. Black, "What Is My Beloved? On Erotic Reading and the Song of Songs," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Fiona C. Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions, SemeiaSt 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 35–52.

persuasive discourse the Song succeeds seemingly effortlessly. In comparison with Proverbs it is—shall we say?—more seductive.

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Translating Two Job-ish Psalms

Everett Fox

In Ed Greenstein's honor, I will treat two contrasting psalms (Pss 39 and 8) that have consistently been recognized to have connections to the book of Job. Psalm 39, in mood and some vocabulary, recalls a number of Joban passages, and Ps 8:5 is the jumping-off point for the famous parody in Job 7:17. The first poem is incontestably stormy and even gloomy; the second has delighted generations of the pious with its appreciation of the created world and humanity's paradoxically exalted place in it. My focus will be on translation, a field that has long occupied Greenstein and to which he has contributed signally in a number of essays.¹ I will not be concentrating here on philology but rather on aspects of what must be termed performance. All translation in some way partakes of performance, as the translator tries to present the work anew through conscious and unconscious artifice. But since we cannot reconstruct the venues, occasions, or performance practices of much of biblical literature, we are left to concentrate on the poetic aspects of texts and attempt at least a rudimentary version of recited performance. I will present my translations of these two psalms, tentative as they must be, as a gift in gratitude to Ed Greenstein. In the case of Ps 39, my concern will be coordinating its English vocabulary with relevant passages in Job. While this will also apply to my treatment of Psalm 8:5, I will mainly address the important rhythmic aspects of that poem.

It is with much gratitude and pleasure that I contribute to this volume. Over the course of four decades, Ed Greenstein has generously dispensed to me encouragement and honest criticism and shared his philological acumen. In a very real sense, my volumes of Bible translation work would not exist without his valued input.

1. Edward L. Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, BJS 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

No book of the Bible is as bound to performance as Psalms. From earliest times it has found a central place in public and private liturgy, and its recitation by Jews and Christians in exultation and despair has continued unabated down to the present. From antiquity, through temple practice and Dead Sea communities, in rabbinic prayer and midrash, New Testament quotation, medieval psalters with their illustrations of King David at composition and prayer, Benedictine devotion, Jewish "Psalm Societies" in Eastern Europe, and countless other venues, the psalms have primarily functioned as oral devotional texts. Such practice would not be possible without an appreciation of their intensely rhythmic character. This has been recognized and realized in many attempts at translation; one is reminded of it on the very title page of the King James Bible of 1611, with its subtitle "Appointed to Be Read in Churches." Every reading in liturgy, and every modern quoting of or allusion to the psalms in literature, stage, and film, breathes these elements of performance and is conditioned by them. Accordingly, the demands of translation vis-à-vis this book exceed those of most others in the Bible.

Psalm 39

In the present instance, I was led to the issue of performance by recalling my first encounter with Psalm 39 more than fifty years ago, in neither an academic nor a Jewish liturgical context. I had come to know the *German Requiem* of Brahms, the work that catapulted him to fame at the age of thirty-six.² Unlike most classical requiems, such as those by Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and Fauré, which take as their setting the Catholic Mass for the Dead, Brahms, a north German Protestant by birth but a rather more universal artist by temperament, chose his own texts to set from the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. Of particular interest is the third movement of the piece, written for orchestra, chorus, and baritone soloist. This section makes use of four verses from Ps 39 (5–8), an excerpt that focuses on the transience of human life in a collection of ideas that is frequently found in poetic sections of the Hebrew Bible such as Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, and Job. The psalm itself, as hinted at above, contains elements of despair

2. The initial six-movement work was finished in 1868; the premiere of the full version, encompassing seven movements, did not occur until the following year. Cf. Styra Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 355–56, 382.

and ends with the poet's plea for God to leave him alone before he dies. But Brahms's setting alters the mood somewhat:

[Baritone]: *Herr, lehre doch mich
Dass ein Ende mit mir haben muss,
Und mein Leben ein Ziel hat,
Und ich davon muss.*

*Siehe, meine Tage
Sind einer Hand breit vor dir,
Und mein Leben ist wie nichts vor dir.
Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen,
Die doch so sicher leben.
Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen,
Und machen ihnen viel vergebliche Unruhe;
Sie sammeln, und wissen nicht wer es kriegen wird.
Nun Herr, wess soll ich mich trösten?
Ich hoffe auf dich.*

This translation is based on a nineteenth-century edition of Luther's Bible; the only change from the classic Luther work of 1545 is verse 6's *kriegen* for the earlier *einnehmen*. Musically, Brahms's treatment puts particular emphasis on the soaring and fateful line, *Und ich davon muss* (equivalent to "And I must perish"), and also on the Ecclesiastes-like *Sie sammeln, und wissen nicht wer es kriegen wird*, which melodically echoes the opening of the movement.

It is perhaps emblematic of the history of Bible interpretation and editing,³ not to mention Brahms's own inclinations elsewhere,⁴ that the gloom of the Hebrew is not allowed to stand. After verse 8's plea for hope, the composer inserted a more positive note, which he chose from Wis 3:1: *Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand und keine Qual rühret sie an*,

3. One is reminded of the traditional endings of Lamentations and Ecclesiastes, where the penultimate verse of the book is repeated after the original final verse in the interests of muting the inherent pessimism.

4. In his setting of Hölderlin's *Hyperions Schicksalslied* (*Song of Destiny*), whose text moves from heavenly bliss to despair at humanity's cruel fate, Brahms tempers the storm-tossed mood by reprising the gentle opening theme with muted strings, sans words, in the concluding orchestral section of the piece.

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them” (KJV).

Quite apart from Brahmsian optimism, however, the psalm in Hebrew may strike one as an odd and rather difficult poem.⁵ While many interpreters understand the *mise-en-scène* of the psalm to be the author’s illness, coming as it does after Ps 38,⁶ others see it as a wisdom text on the theme of mortality⁷ and best understood in the context of the several psalms that end book 1 of the whole collection (Pss 1–41). If one treats it, first, as a purely isolated poem, the psalm recalls Ecclesiastes in its more negative moments, not least because of its obvious repetition of *הבֹל* in verses 6, 7, and 12. A strong connection with Job, too, is apparent. I will deal here with a number of verses from the psalm that appear to be alluded to by Job. As Greenstein warns in his study of Jeremiah’s influence on Job, one should be wary of assigning intertextual influence with certainty.⁸ Yet, as Kynes convincingly argues in his detailed study of Job and the Psalms, in this case the bond seems solid.⁹

From the translator’s point of view, it could be maintained that there are moments when one should try when possible to have the same English word reproduce a Hebrew one. This mainly comes into play when one book appears to allude to the other, and then the goal of the translation is to retain the possible connection between the two books. This practice is often warily eyed by Bible translators, who rightly seek to provide a richly varied English and wish to reflect the range of meanings of biblical Hebrew words. Why, for instance, would one render multiple occurrences of a verb such as *ראה* by the same word in English, when “look at,” “gaze,” “regard,”

5. Phil J. Botha, “Psalm 39 and Its Place in the Development of a Doctrine of Divine Retribution in the Hebrew Bible,” *OTE* 30 (2017): 240, describes it as “perplexing” in his comprehensive article on the psalm. See also the discussion in Tova Forti, “*Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*: Methodological Vagueness in Defining Wisdom Psalms,” in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, ed. Mark R. Sneed, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 210–12.

6. Already suggested by Ibn Ezra.

7. Botha, “Psalm 39,” 241ff.

8. Edward L. Greenstein, “Jeremiah as an Inspiration for the Poet of Job,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. John Kaltner and Louis Stulman (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 99: “We are properly cautioned not to form facile judgment concerning how Job and another text are interrelated.”

9. Will Kynes, “Harrassed Hope: Psalm 39 in Job,” in *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job’s Dialogue with the Psalms*, BZAW 437 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 122–41.

and so on are available?¹⁰ Or baby Moses's floating basket (Exod 2:3), an image fixed firmly in traditional readers' minds, by anything so ungainly as "ark" or "little-ark?" In the first case, there are passages in which the verb *ראה* functions as a *Leitwort*, tying a cycle of texts together thematically.¹¹ In the second, there is clearly a relationship to a previous text, given the obvious and profound connection between the *תיבה* and the one by Noah, his family, and his animal kingdom in Gen 6–8. My principle, then, is to try and keep the same word or English root when I judge a possible connection between passages to be of import and to loosen the practice of such coordination when in my view it adds nothing to our understanding of the text or is impossible to utilize because it does too much violence to English. This means that it is almost always the translator's judgment call. It also should not prejudice the interpreter's views on the dating of texts, that is, their relative chronology. But it at least keeps open the potential for exploring some kind of relationship between passages. While such connections are often noted in translations by footnotes—for example, "cf. Ps 39:14"—doing so removes the relationship to a place that readers may ignore and teachers may find awkward or unclear in presenting textual comparisons. In contrast, I seek to make it possible to put English texts side by side.

Following are a number of passages/phrases that connect Ps 39 with Job, with a sampling of mostly recent translations.

1. Job 6:8, 11

מי יתן תבוא שאלתי ותקותי יתן אלוה ... מה כחי כי איחל ומה קצי כי אאריך נפשי

As Kynes points out, several words here link up to phrases found in Ps 39.¹² The roots *קוה*, *יחל*, *קצה* occur in verses 5 and 8; although "my end" (a form

10. This is conventionally done in occurrences of the verb in the narratives about the early life of Moses (Exod 2–3), for example. But the verb functions to tie threads of the narrative together, culminating in 3:7's *במצרים* *אשר עמי* *את עני עמי אשר במצרים* (see Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* [New York: Schocken, 1997], 251–52).

11. See the classic formulations by Martin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative" and "Leitwort Type and Discourse: An Example," in Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 114–28, 143–50.

12. Kynes, "Harassed Hope," 131.

unique in these two appearances¹³) and “hope” will work for both texts, קוה is a little more difficult to coordinate, requiring something like “O ... that God would grant what I wait for” for the Job passage.

2. Job 7:16

חדל ממני כי הבל ימי

Although at first blush הבל recalls the ringing opening lines of Ecclesiastes, its threefold use in the psalm can also be related to Job’s cry in this passage.

3. Job 7:21

ומה לא תשא פשעי ותעביר את עוני
כי עתה לעפר אשכב ושחרתני ואינני

The last word of this sequence is notable. The entire verse is typical of Job’s speeches, with the accusation that God is not lenient enough with him, for soon God will come looking for him, but he will have died in the interim. The simple ending, which has the flavor of disappearance or even annihilation (cf. Jacob’s pathetic expression of loss in Gen 42:36, יוסף איננו ושמעון, (איננו), compresses the thought and emotion into one Hebrew word, which also forms the last moment in the psalm. But whereas in the psalm the author used ואינני to plead for a little time away from the unbearable gaze of God, in Job it comes across almost as a threat, rather akin to the “Dead men do not/cannot praise God” of Ps 115:17.

English translations conventionally render ואינני by “I will be gone” (e.g., NET, HCSB) or “I shall not be” (e.g., ESV, KJV, NRSV), with occasional forays into “and am no more” (Segal) and “I shall be no more” (Gordis).¹⁴ Regardless, coordinating it with the psalm presents no problem.¹⁵

13. Kynes, “Harassed Hope,” 131.

14. Benjamin J. Segal, *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* (New York: Gefen, 2013); Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). All subsequent in-text references to Gordis are to the volume cited here.

15. In the sometimes charming manner of English rhyming versions of the Psalms, the entire last verse of the psalm is rendered thus by eighteenth-century poet Christopher Smart: “For a little space O spare me, / and my strength a while restore, / Ere thy final sentence bear me / To be seen on earth no more” (in Donald Davie, ed., *The Psalms in English* [London: Penguin, 1996], 238). Eugene Peterson, in his

In addition, the terms פשע and עון make their appearance in the Job quotation and perhaps echo their appearance in verses 9 and 12 of the psalm. Again, English translations vary in their renderings of these terms; Alter, sadly, reverses their order between the two texts, using “sin” for פשע in Job¹⁶ and “crime” in the psalm, with the mirror image of “crime” and “sins” for עון.

4. Job 9:27

אם אמרי אשכחה שיחי
אעזבה פני ואבליגה

This verse certainly hints at Job’s playing off Ps 39, since the relatively rare root בלג, toward the end of the psalm, occurs twice in Job and then again only in Amos 5:9 with a rather different connotation. Translations of the expression in verse 14 of the psalm differ here in nuance, ranging from the ubiquitous “that I may take comfort a little” or KJV’s “comfort myself” to “revive” (supported by LXX), “recover” (NJPS, with the note “Meaning of Heb. uncertain”; also Rozenberg and Zlotowitz), “regain strength” (supported by both Rashi and Ibn Ezra), “catch my breath” (Alter), “smile” (Terrien, CEB, CEV, Ecumenical Grail Psalter), and “have a little cheer” or “be of good cheer” (Gordis, ESV, and NRSV).¹⁷ The verb appears again in 10:20. I am attracted to possible connotations of light in this case; hence my “brighten up.”

5. Job 10:20

ואבליגה מעט

memorable translation of the Bible into erstwhile hip language, The Message, renders the last phrase of Ps 39 as “before it’s too late and I’m out of here” (*The Old Testament: Wisdom Books* [Colorado Springs: NAV Press, 1996]).

16. Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

17. Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2000); Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009); Samuel Terrien, in *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); *The Ecumenical Grail Psalter* (Chicago: GIA, 2015).

For the second iteration of בָּלַג Alter uses “have some gladness” (following Scheindlin), having already rendered the verb by “and be gladdened” in the 9:27 passage.¹⁸ As noted above, he switches to “catch my breath” for the word’s appearance in the psalm. In fact, of the fifty or so English translations presented in www.biblegateway.com, not a comprehensive list by any means, fewer than ten make the effort to coordinate the translation of בָּלַג between Psalms and Job (and Gordis even moves to “that I may see a little light” here). Yet one could argue that, combined with other examples enumerated here, coordinating them makes it possible for a reader studying Job to find meaningful cross-references between the two books.

6. Job 10:21

The simple בְּטֶרֶם אֵלֶיךָ is almost always reproduced by “before I go,” with an occasional “before I leave.” To stand out more in coordination with Job, I have inserted “[hence]” at the end of the psalm and here.

7. Job 13:28; 20:20

כִּי בָגַד אָכְלוּ עֵשׂ needs no adjusting; in the psalm (v. 12), the question concerns not the moth but what חֲמוּדוֹ means. If Job and the psalm are related here, that might tilt the translation in favor of man’s “treasure” or “in what he delights,” as opposed to the sometimes-proposed “beauty,” presumably indicating the human body.¹⁹ In the Job passage, the reference is to what the wicked devour in their greed.

8. Job 14:6

The verb שָׁעָה is alternately rendered by “turn away” (e.g., Gordis) or “look away” most frequently. In Gen 4:4–5, describing God’s reaction to Cain and Abel’s sacrifices, it carries the connotation of “have regard for,” and hence one could argue for “gaze away from” or “turn your regard from,” which works in both the psalm and Job. It should be noted that the con-

18. Alter, *The Wisdom Books*; Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998).

19. As, for instance, Amos Hakham, *The Bible: Psalms, with the Jerusalem Commentary* (New York: Judaica, 2003); and Fleming James, *Thirty Psalmists: Personalities of the Psalter* (New York: Seabury, 1965).

nections between Job and Ps 39 do not negate other ties. Barbiero notes how, when one considers the psalm as part of a sequence, 38–41, possibly even expanding it into a larger unit by including 35–37,²⁰ the nature of its ideas changes somewhat. Psalms 35–41, in this reading, focus on *silence*, which is part and parcel of 39's opening but soon overcome by the poet's inability to keep from speaking out (rather like Job himself: muted at the beginning and end of the book but quite vocal in the middle). A common vocabulary is sprinkled throughout, although the usages vary, sometimes dramatically.²¹

Also parallel to Ps 39 is Ps 73. Connections of wording are suggested by תוכחתי (v. 12, also v.12 in 39, לא ינגעו (v. 5; v.11 in 39); and others: טוב, רשע, יודע, אדם, לשון, בלה, and צלם. Botha maintains that “the authors of both psalms ... seem to have been disillusioned by the ‘simplistic’ perspective which is presented as the proper reaction to the postponement of retribution in Psalms 34 and 37.”²² But Ps 73 seems to be a more optimistic response to 39.²³

Having made the above observations, I present here a provisional translation of Ps 39, *pace* Brahms. I have put words that appear to be alluded to by Job in boldface in English and indicated those related verses in the footnotes as an example of a small study guide.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| למנצח לידיתון מזמור לדוד | 1 |
| אמרתי אשמרה דרכי מחטוא | 2 |
| בלשוני | |
| אשמרה לפי מחסום | |
| בעד רשע לנגדי | |
| נאלמתי דומיה החשיתי מטוב | 3 |
| וכאבי נעבר | |

20. Cited in Botha, “Psalm 39,” 246–47.

21. Psalm 34 shares טוב (v. 13), לשון (v. 14), and שועה (16); Psalm 37 includes the roots דמם and יחל (v. 7), חמה and עזב, ידע (v. 18), איננו and אין (vv. 10 and 36), and שוכן (vv. 3, 27, 29; cf. the גר and תושב in 39:13). For Botha (“Psalm 39,” 254), who analyzes the connections in detail (251–54): “The author of Psalm 39 uses words which occur in the other two ... psalms to formulate statements which question or contradict the established beliefs of wisdom piety and the promises made there.... it was possibly intended to serve as a muted response to the more optimistic expectations of those two.” One might take this further and suggest that Job plays a similar role in the Bible as a whole.

22. Botha, “Psalm 39,” 258, 261.

23. Botha, “Psalm 39,” 260–61.

חס לבי בקרבי	4
בהגיגי תבער אש	
דברתי בלשוני	5
הודיעני יהוה קצי	
ומדת ימי מה היא	
אדעה מה חדל אני	
הנה טפחות נתתה ימי	6
וחלדי כאין נגדך	
אך כל הבל כל אדם נצב סלה	
אך בצלם יתהלך איש	
אך הבל יהמיון	7
יצבר	
ולא ידע מי אספם	
ועתה מה קויתי אדני	8
תוחלתי לך היא	
מכל פשעי הצילני	9
חרפת נבל אל תשימיני	
נאלמתי לא אפתח פי	10
כי אתה עשית	
הסר מעלי נגעך	11
מתגרת ידך אני כליתי	
בתוכחות על עון יסרת איש	12
ותמס כעש חמודו	
אך הבל כל אדם סלה	
שמעה תפלתי יהוה	13
ושועתי האזינה	
אל דמעתי אל תחרש	
כי גר אנכי עמך	
תושב ככל אבותי	
השע ממני ואבליגה	14
בטרם אלך ואינני	

- 1 For the Leader, for Yedutun. A David Melody-with-Strings.
- 2 I said [to myself]: Let me keep my ways from sinning
with my tongue;
let me keep a muzzle on my mouth
while a wicked one is before me.
- 3 I was mute, in stillness, I was silent [even] from good,
yet my pain was stirred up;
- 4 my heart was hot within me—
in my musing, a fire burned!
- 5 I spoke with my tongue:

- Make me to know, O YHWH, my **end**,²⁴
 and the measure of my days—what it is;
 I would know how fleeting I am.
- 6 Here, as handbreadths you have made my days;
 my lifetime is as naught before you—
 surely all as **breath**²⁵ does all humanity stand! *Selah*
- 7 Surely in darkness people walk about;
 surely as [mere] breath do they clamor!
 They **heap up**²⁶ [possessions]
 and do not know who will gather them.
- 8 But now, what do I **wait**²⁷ for, O Lord?
 My **hope**²⁸—it is in you.
- 9 From all my **transgressions**²⁹ rescue me;
 the reproach of a vile one do not make me!
- 10 I was mute, I did not open my mouth,
 for you have done it.
- 11 Remove your **stroke**³⁰ from me;
 from the assault of your hand I am consumed.
- 12 With rebukes for **iniquity**³¹, you chasten people;
 you cause to melt away, **like a moth**³², **what they desire**³³—
 surely a [mere] breath is all humanity! *Selah*
- 13 Hearken to my prayer, O YHWH,
 to my cry-for-help give ear,
 to my tears do not be deaf!
 For I am a sojourner with you,
 a recent-settler, like all my fathers.
- 14 **Turn your regard from me, that I may brighten up**³⁴
before I go³⁵ [hence] **and am no more.**³⁶

24. Cf. Job 6:11.

25. Cf. Job 7:16.

26. Cf. Job 27:16.

27. Cf. Job 6:11.

28. Cf. Job 6:8.

29. Cf. Job 7:2.

30. Cf. Job 19:21.

31. Cf. Job 7:21.

32. Cf. Job 13:28.

33. Cf. Job 20:20.

34. Cf. Job 14:6.

35. Cf. Job 7:9.

36. Cf. Job 7:8.

Notes to the Translation

2. **muzzle ... mouth:** The alliteration in English is not intentional. 3. **[even] from:** Or “far from.”³⁷ 5. **my end ... what it is:** I was unable to reflect the rhyme of קצִי ... מֵה הִיא in English, which I regard as signaling a dramatic opening to the author’s speech and thus worthy of reproduction. 5–6. **fleeting ... lifetime:** The reversal of the letters f-l-t into l-f-t is meant to reflect the Hebrew wordplay of חָלַל and חָדַל. Alter points the way with “fleeting ... lot.”³⁸ 6. I have left this rather difficult line as awkward and enigmatic in English, rather than removing the first כָּל and נֹצֵב, as many reasonably suggest. Terrien tries for a more integrative text, with “Yes, a mere breath is man, though he walks erect.”³⁹ 5, 7. **make me to know ... I would know ... they do not know:** Glatzer points to the verb יָדַע as a key one throughout Job, culminating in the divine speeches at the end of the book.⁴⁰ 8. **it is in you:** This serves as a bracket with verse 5’s “what it is” (Hebrew מֵה הִיא and לָךְ הִיא). 9. **vile one:** Often rendered “fool,” this seems more in keeping with moments in Psalms where נָבַל is a synonym for רָשָׁע and the like, such as in 14:1.⁴¹ NJPS and Alter inexplicably render the whole phrase חֲרַפַּת נָבַל in alliteration, “the butt of the benighted” and “the scourge of a scoundrel.”⁴² 12. **people ... they:** Using the plural to provide a smoother English.

So from the moment the psalmist opens his mouth to speak in verse 5, we observe, or rather hear, a vocabulary that is in relationship with Job. For Kynes, Ps 39 is basically a poem of complaint; he takes the view that Job plays off the psalm by using its phrases to build not only his complaints but also his arguments.⁴³ In other words, as he does with other biblical texts,⁴⁴ Job is able to make use of established echoes to reinforce his case.

37. Botha, “Psalm 39.”

38. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*.

39. Terrien, *The Psalms*.

40. Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Dimensions of Job: A Study and Selected Readings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 6–11.

41. Hakham, *The Bible*. He uses “base man” for נָבַל, as I do for its multiple occurrences in Samuel and Kings, in my *The Early Prophets* (New York: Schocken, 2014).

42. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*.

43. Kynes, “Harassed Hope.”

44. See Greenstein, “Jeremiah as an Inspiration.”

Psalm 8

A far cry from Ps 39 is Ps 8, a beloved text that stands as a short classic of Biblical Hebrew poetry. It is, of course, memorably linked to Job by the latter's bitter parody of verse 5 in Job 7:17, about which more below. For the moment, it will suffice to observe that, from a translator's point of view, the main issue with the psalm is how to capture its rhythm. The poem is a showpiece of devotional literature, and care must be taken to preserve, or at least echo, the rhythmic features that contribute strongly to the effectiveness of the poem. In this vein, we may observe that, as with the refrain-studded example of Gen 1, its overarching ordering of sound is a major factor in presenting a view of creation as orderly and balanced and therefore ultimately meaningful. In the psalm, as noted above, this sense of cosmic order is placed in the service of gratitude for the lofty status and task of human beings, despite their otherwise puny position in the larger perspective of the universe.

As with Ps 39, I first encountered Ps 8 in a nonacademic setting, as I have written elsewhere,⁴⁵ very much connected to performance. Abba Eban, who in addition to his diplomatic resume was trained in Classical and Oriental Languages at Cambridge, made a recording of some psalms and excerpts from Ecclesiastes in the late 1950s. Included was his oral rendition of Ps 8, in both King James English and Hebrew, a model (despite the South African-turned-British accent) of a reading based on a knowledge of Biblical Hebrew grammar and diction. Through Eban, I was made aware for the first time of the rhetorical power and beauty of Biblical Hebrew.

The psalm contains rhyming doublets: *שָׁמַיִךְ* and *אֶצְבְּעֶיךָ* in verse 4; *תִּפְקְדֵנוּ* and *תִּזְכְּרֵנוּ* in verse 5; and *תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ* and *וְתַחֲסֶרְהוּ* in verse 6, followed immediately by *תִּמְשִׁלֵּהוּ* in the next verse. The cascading sequence of rhymes is crowned by a rhythmic departure, the more abrupt *כָּל שֵׁתָה* *כָּל שֵׁתָה*,⁴⁶ which also serves to introduce the list of fauna in verses 8 and 9. In turn, the list is rounded out sonically by the notable *עֲבַר אֲרָחוֹת* *עֲבַר אֲרָחוֹת* at the end of verse 9, preceding the reprise of verse 1's praise of God's name. How is the translator to respond to these challenges, which beg for

45. In the introduction to my *The Early Prophets*, xiv.

46. This kind of rhythmic shift frequently operates in biblical Hebrew. Cf. Gen 1:16, where two equal phrases about the heavenly bodies (*אֶת הַמֶּאֱוֹר הַגָּדוֹל לַמַּשְׁלָל* and *וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים*) are capped off by the shorter *וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים* (*וְאֵת הַמֶּאֱוֹר הַקָּטָן לַמַּשְׁלָל הַלֵּילָה* and *וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים*).

some kind of symmetry? One “solution” to rendering psalms in the past, well back into the history of English Bible translation, is to render these texts in rhyme. While this does not put the proper focus on the passages just adduced, it does suggest some kind of performance and, in the case of such translations as the 1630 *Bay Psalm Book*, certainly functioned that way in the liturgy of various communities. The practice was also followed by individual English poets. Note, for instance, the early attempt of Milton to render the whole of verse 5:

When I behold thy heavens, thy fingers’ art,
The moon and stars which thou so bright hast set
in the pure firmament, then saith thy heart,
Oh, what is man that thou rememberest yet

And think’st upon him; or of man begot,
That him thou visit’st, and of him art found?
Scarce to be less than gods, thou mad’st his lot,
With honour and with state thou hast him crowned.⁴⁷

But *Paradise Lost* this is not, and it certainly does not aid the reader in appreciating the tight sound-structures of the original.

The well-known parody of verse 5 in Job 7:17 is worded thus: מה אנוש / כי תגדלנו / וכי תשית אליו לבך / ותפקדנו לבקרים / לרגעים תבחננו (“What are human beings, that you magnify them, / that you fix your attention upon them— / you mark them [every] morning, / [every] moment you examine them?”). It surely harks back to the Ps 8 text: מה אנוש כי תזכרנו / ובן אדם / כי תפקדנו. But in order to make the connection between the two books in translation, a strict rhythm needs to be maintained for the psalm. A few examples will help illuminate how poets and translators have seldom solved the problem satisfactorily:

King James Version (1611; but already in Coverdale, 1535): What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Alter: “What is man that You should note him, / and the human creature, that You pay him heed...?”⁴⁸

47. Dated 14 August 1653, in Davie, *The Psalms in English*, 140.

48. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*.

ESV: What is man that you are mindful of him, / and the son of man that you care for him?

NIV: What is mankind that you are mindful of them, / human beings that you care for them?

Segal: What is a man that You take note of him, / mortal man that You pay heed to him...?⁴⁹

This last rendition comes closer to the rhythm of the Hebrew, although the insertion of the indefinite article before “man” feels asymmetrical and unnecessary. For my part, like some others, I have found that putting the verse in plural makes more sense and helps rhythmically: What are mortals, that you note them, / human beings, that you mark them? My desire to create a tight parallel rhythm is based on the conviction that the impact of the entire poem is focused on this moment, as an introduction to the heavily rhythmical rhetoric to follow. Here, then, is the psalm in its entirety, newly rendered.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| למנצח על הגתית מזמור לדוד | 1 |
| יהוה אדנינו | 2 |
| מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ | |
| אשר תנה הודך על השמים | 3 |
| מפי עוללים וינקים | |
| יסדת עז למען צורריך | |
| להשבית אויב ומתנקם | |
| כי אראה שמך | 4 |
| מעשי אצבעתיך | |
| ירח וכוכבים אשר כוננתה | |
| מה אנוש כי תזכרנו | 5 |
| ובן אדם כי תפקדנו | |
| ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים | 6 |
| וכבוד והדר תעטרהו | |
| תמשילהו במעשי ידיך | 7 |
| כל שתה תחת רגליו | |
| צנה ואלפים כלם | 8 |
| וגם בהמות שדי | |
| צפור שמים ודגי הים | 9 |
| עבר ארחות ימים | |

49. Segal, *A New Psalm*.

יהוה אֲדִינִנוּ 10
מִה אֲדִיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ

- 1 For the Leader on the Gittit; a David Melody-with-Strings.
- 2 YHWH, our Lord,
how glorious is your name in all the earth,
- 3 whose splendor is set above the heavens!
By the mouth of infants and sucklings
you have founded strength on account of your enemies,
to still the foe and the avenger.
- 4 When I gaze at your heavens,
the works of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have fixed firm:
- 5 What are mortals, that you note them,
human beings, that you mark them?
- 6 Yet you have made them lack but little to be godlike,
and with dignity and honor you have crowned them.
- 7 You have let them rule the works of your hands—
all [things] you place beneath their feet:
- 8 sheep and oxen, all of them,
and also the beasts of the field,
- 9 the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
what passes along the paths of the seas.
- 10 YHWH, our Lord,
how glorious is your name in all the earth!

Notes to the Translation

2. **Lord ... glorious:** Echoing the alliteration of אֲדִינִנוּ and אֲדִיר. In the same vein, Alter uses “Master” and “majestic.”⁵⁰ 3. **heavens! / By the mouth of babes and sucklings:** Some suggest the equivalent of “heavens, by the mouths of babes and sucklings.”⁵¹ 4. **works:** LXX has the singular here. 5. **them:** I have used the plural here and following, regarding the nouns as collectives in any case. 6. **lack but little:** Following Buber, who reflects the alliteration of מִעֵט מַאֲלֵהִים.⁵² 6–7. **you have made them ... you have crowned them ... You have let them:** Hinting at the הו- endings in each case. 7. **all [things] you place beneath their feet:** Eschewing “have

50. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*.

51. See, for instance, the Good News Translation.

52. Martin Buber, *Die Schriftwerke*, vol. 4 of *Die Schrift* (Köln: Hegner, 1962).

placed,” in contrast to the verbs cited in the preceding note, reflects the sound break after the ִי - endings in verses 6–7 and has the rhetorical effect of introducing the list of animals to follow. 9. **what passes along the paths of the seas:** As noted above, this stich caps the list, with a mild sound play.

As a rhythmic poem clearly intended for careful recitation, Ps 8, like other brief works such as Pss 23 and 148, is able to convey what mere vocabulary cannot. It is a good example of the challenge posed by translating this most central of biblical books, a challenge that can sometimes be met in individual cases but has rarely been accomplished in toto.

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What Do Job's Friends Want Him to Do?

Michael V. Fox

What do Job's friends want of him? By "friends" I refer first to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. I consider the Elihu speech (Job 32–35) a later addition, but he, too, makes demands of Job, and I will later compare his ideas to those of the first three friends. I will argue that the main issue for them is not Job's sin and repentance but the way he presents himself to God in time of crisis, which must be subordination, which must include petition.

First, how should we evaluate Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and, later, Elihu, as friends and thinkers? They are often the butt of scholarly hostility and derision, but for the dialogue to be a worthy exercise in moral imagination and religious inquiry, we must take the friends seriously, as I think the author does. They are not "friends" in scare-quotes but true friends. Think of what they go through to console Job. They meet and travel from afar to give him solace. They sit with him in the dust and ashes, holding silence out of respect for his pain until he speaks out; then they respond, saying what they believe is right. They will remain with him in the dust and ashes, even as he irritates them intensely, even after he says things he considers sinful, even as he is abandoned by his relations (6:15; 19:13), and even after his comforters have fallen into frustrated silence.

The three friends are not cruel, though Job, speaking in pain and anger (6:3, 11) does call them that (e.g., 2:11; 6:15; 12:4; 16:20; 19:13–14; 32:3; 35:4). They are serious comforters, albeit unsuccessful and misguided. When they do speak, they try to help Job by persuading him to do something. But *what*?

Commentators assume that Job's friends are castigating him for presumed sins that must have caused his punishment, as they assume his suffering to be, and are demanding that he repent and beg God for forgiveness. The debate is assumed to pivot on the question of justice, understood as appropriate and proportionate reward and punishment for

one's deeds. There is no doubt that the friends hold to the doctrine of retribution. They often assert that the righteous will prosper and the wicked suffer—emphasizing the latter. By this they are insisting on the validity of the moral order, which is the inevitable working of the principle of recompense. Job, it should be noted, also holds to this doctrine, but he is bewildered and enraged to see it failing in his case and, by extension, throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the friends do not explicitly use this doctrine to explain Job's suffering or to justify God. They treat Job's former—presumed—offenses rather gingerly and allusively and do not directly blame his current sufferings on them. This will change radically in Eliphaz's third speech, in Job 22, to which I will return later. But first I want to look at how the dialogue develops to that point.

The friends have come to comfort Job, and they are indeed comforters. נַחֲמָה, comforting, is, as David Lambert says, a ritual act, a social transaction.¹ It is not always pleasant or even soothing. The friends' "intervention is meant to constitute or provoke the transformation from a state of mourning to a normal state of being."² Consolation can employ an adversarial stance, or at least some chiding. According to Lambert, "in their attempt to reconcile Job to his situation, his friends accuse him of error and of neglecting the potential for divine consolation of the righteous."³

This tactic fails to work on Job, affecting neither his actions nor his emotions (except to irritate him). But Job is not in a normal state of mourning. He grieves less for his losses in property and lives than for his loss of honor. For this the friends have nothing to offer Job other than (as Job says) their silent presence (13:3).

Eliphaz begins gently. To strengthen Job, Eliphaz reminds him that he, Job, used to strengthen others. So this is what Eliphaz sees himself as doing: not as castigating and shaming Job but comforting and strengthening him (4:2–6). He is not condemning Job for his past deeds but only reminding him that there is a way to deal with his misery. Eliphaz does not understand why, if Job could strengthen others in their crisis, he is proving so weak in his own. This weakness is condemned as a moral flaw. The issue from the start is how one responds to calamity, not what one did to cause it.

1. David Lambert, "The Book of Job in Ritual Perspective," *JBL* 134 (2015): 557–73.

2. Lambert, "Book of Job," 561–62.

3. Lambert, "Book of Job," 562.

To reassure Job, Eliphaz asks, “Isn’t your fear [that is to say, your fear of God] your confidence and the innocence [תם] of your ways your hope?” (4:6). At this point Eliphaz believes that Job is basically innocent and God-fearing, and Job should draw confidence from knowing this. Yet he is נבהל, panicked (4:5). Eliphaz apparently assumes that Job dreads the only misfortune left to him to suffer—death—and to reassure him points out something he must already know: “Try to remember: Which innocent man [נקי] has ever perished? And just where were the righteous destroyed?” (4:7). The answer is presumed to be obvious to all: no one and nowhere. Note that Eliphaz is assuming that Job is indeed a נקי. There are reasons a basically innocent man may suffer—as a warning or correction, for example (5:17)—for innocence is not perfection. But this kind of suffering need not mean death, which here means premature death.⁴

Chapter 5 connects smoothly with Eliphaz’s assertion in 4:1–11 that there is hope for Job. Bildad affirms this hope: “Look, God will not despise the innocent, nor will he grasp the hand of evildoers” (8:20). Bildad wants Job to have hope, and Job can have hope, in fact, is *obliged* to hope, because hope is an expression of trust in God’s benevolence. Job is innocent enough that God will not despise him but rather will support him (8:21). For Job to think otherwise is to impugn God’s goodness and justice—which, of course, is exactly what Job is doing.

The flaw of Job that most troubles his friends is his present failure of nerve. His fear and hopelessness make him talk nonsense and lies. He is obstinate, going so far as to rebuff תנחמות אל, “the comforts of God” (15:11), by which Eliphaz refers to his own words. Zophar alleges that Job is pretending to deep wisdom and knowledge of God because he does not accept the friends’ wisdom and their view of divine justice (11:7–9).

Even as the friends cease to speak of Job as righteous, they still focus on his present failings. Past sins there must have been, but they are not what concern the friends now. Consider that they kept silent for seven

4. In the MT, 4:12–21 belongs to Eliphaz. This identification has been challenged by certain scholars, including Edward L. Greenstein, “The Extent of Job’s First Speech” [Hebrew], in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis 6: Presented to Menachem Cohen*, ed. Shmuel Vargon et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2005), 245–62; and, most extensively, Ken Brown, *The Vision in Job 4 and Its Role in the Book: Reframing the Development of the Joban Dialogues*, FAT 2/75 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). Since the speaker of 4:12–21 does not tell Job to do anything, his identity does not bear directly on the question raised in this essay.

days. If they were demanding repentance for past sins, they would have begun their preaching as soon as they arrived. Why waste time? Instead, they speak only after Job has begun his complaints because *their* content is what they are responding to.

The friends rarely, if ever, tell Job to repent in any sense. (David Lambert gives reason to doubt the existence of penitence as interior regret in the Bible, at least until a later period in the literature, but repentance as ceasing to sin and rectifying wrongs was always possible.⁵)

The rectification needed by Job is not to correct the behavior that got him into this state but to change his current state of mind, for this is what is blocking reconciliation with God. If he still possesses the fruits of prior crimes, he must of course restore them. As Bildad says, “If there is iniquity in your hands, get rid of it, and do not let wickedness reside in your tent” (11:14). Bildad is using “iniquity” and “wickedness” as metonyms for wealth gained by wickedness. If any of this remains, Job must get rid of it in order to be ready for reconciliation. Note Bildad’s tentative “if.” Earlier Bildad set another condition: “If you seek God and beseech Shaddai, if you are pure and upright, then God will stir up (mercy) for you and make your righteous abode whole” (8:6). This is an embedded conditional: beseeching God is effective only if one is already pure and upright, but being pure and upright is not enough. One must also seek God. Eliphaz presented himself as a good example: “But I would seek God, to God set my word” (5:8).

Suffering may be inherent in the human condition, and Eliphaz concedes as much in 5:7a: “But man is born for suffering [עַמַּל].” In fact, even the pious Job said as much in the prologue when he resigned himself to his losses by declaring, “The LORD gives and the LORD takes. Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21b). God is just, but sometimes he just gives and takes. Good comes with the bad. Some suffering may be bad fortune, and some may be a test of faith (as the reader knows Job’s to be). Suffering is not proof of sin.

Nevertheless, and contradictorily, the friends do not think that Job is entirely innocent of prior wrongdoing; he must have done *something*, they assume, for “trouble does not just spring out of the ground,” as Eliphaz says (5:6b). Still, their focus is on the present, on Job’s obstinacy, which blocks

5. David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8–10.

his restoration to favor. If Eliphaz himself were to fall into Job's condition—as he significantly concedes could happen—he would turn to God (5:8). Job's opening complaint could have been tolerated, but only if it had been followed by an entreaty to God.

Job must entreat God. Several verbs express this basic idea: *דרש* and *שחר* (both meaning “seek”), *קרא* (“call on”), *התחנן* (“beseech”), *העתיר* (“entreat”), *פרש ידיים* (“spread the hands”). None of these words refers to acts of confession or contrition. They are most often used of entreaty, of asking God for something. The calling out itself is the definitive deed. A precondition for a proper entreaty is *שלוה*, a confident, composed spirit, which, when based on moral rectitude, is itself an expression of trust in God.

What the friends demand of Job is a ritual, a subordination ritual of the sort famously identified by Ervin Goffman.⁶ Its purpose is the restoration of hierarchy. A sufferer, as in a complaint of the individual psalms, must call upon God, thereby acknowledging divine authority as, for example, the psalmist of Ps 13 does in verses 4–6. No inner penitence is required. Just by praising and supplicating God, Job would be acknowledging his rightful and unquestioned dominance. Job is seemingly denying this by his unrelenting accusations of God for injustice, his demands for special adjudication, his insistence on getting a rationale for his suffering, and, above all, by the tremendous fuss he is making, publicly implying that God is not a reliable and benevolent ruler.

In his second speech, Eliphaz's accusations become nastier, but they concern mainly Job's current actions. Eliphaz castigates Job for his pretensions and insolence. Bildad and Zophar basically just chime in.

In the third set of speeches, starting, in chapter 22, Eliphaz suddenly imputes major crimes to Job: “Is your iniquity not great and your sins not endless?” (22:5). Job has taken the garments of the poor in pledge, denied the thirsty water, and so on (22:5–9). Job, as Eliphaz now asserts, once held the world in his evil grasp (22:8). This claim is nonsense, and Eliphaz knows it. For two cycles, even when Eliphaz was angry with Job, he did not think to mention major sins and crimes, or even minor ones. But Eliphaz has been working himself up into a pique.

Eliphaz began his first speech (4:1–5:27) gently, even unctuously, and sought to change Job's attitude with some subtlety (4:1–3). Eliphaz

6. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), 56–57.

is proud of his facility as a counselor (he regards the comforts he offers as nothing less than “the comforts of God,” 15:11; also 22:22). Eliphaz is all the more indignant, then, to have failed to modify Job’s attitudes, and he finally responds to his stubbornness with diatribes. (It is ironic—perhaps deliberately ludicrous—that Eliphaz, who began by scolding Job for his anger, ended up as the angriest of them.)

But Job is much like them in this regard as in others. After hearing just one speech of Eliphaz, he throws all sorts of accusations in his face—and the faces of the two others as well, though they have said nothing at this point. He says, “You [pl.] would even cast lots over the orphan and bargain over your friend” (6:27), though Eliphaz has shown no sign of such selfish cruelty.

You can track Eliphaz’s movement from composure to rage by the distribution of insult verses, by which I mean verses with nasty things said in the second-person. (There are also insults in the third-person, but since these maintain a certain ambiguity about whether they apply only to Job or to evildoers generally, I do not include them in the count.) In the friends’ speeches in chapters 4–27, there are, by my count, twenty-nine insult verses, or 13 percent of the total. Of these, twenty-three, or 79 percent, are from Eliphaz: three in Eliphaz I, ten in Eliphaz II, and ten in Eliphaz III. We see Eliphaz getting increasingly angry as his attempts to educate Job fail. Note how in Eliphaz I Eliphaz said that Job’s fear (that is to say, fear of God) was his hope (4:6). In Eliphaz II he says that Job *violates* fear (15:4). I take Eliphaz’s new imputations of vast prior crimes to Job to be an expression of frustration rather than of ideology or wisdom.

Job himself set Eliphaz on the track of accusation. Job has been insisting that his suffering must be punishment, albeit unjust, as if for a horrible sin he supposedly committed. Eventually, it seems, Eliphaz resigns himself to Job’s obsessions and starts heaping up accusations of the sort Job has seemed to be demanding.

Even in his third speech (22:3–30), when restoration is said to be conditioned on repentance, it is repentance for a present fault. In 22:23 Eliphaz promises: “If you turn to Shaddai you will be rebuilt. You must banish evil from your tent.” The “turn” or “repentance” (שוב) is an act of rectification, a banishing of evil, rather than contrition. “Evil” is at the same time a metonymy for the *gains* of evil deeds, which Job must get rid of. Zophar used “iniquity” and “wickedness” in the same way in 11:14. Eliphaz is speaking about something Job should do now, not about feeling bad for something done in the past. Of course, Job must dispose of any

ill-got gains before the reconciliation, but Eliphaz, like Zophar, does not stipulate penitence and regret for earlier sins. Once the fruits of evil—if there are any—are discarded, calling upon God in some form would be a sufficient action of subordination to him. This is a social act. Sincere regret for past transgressions is an interior, private one, which is useful as a deterrent against future offense but is less important than calling upon God, which reaffirms and shores up the public norm.

The behavior demanded of Job by his friends is modeled on the psalmists of the individual complaint psalms. As Fredrik Lindström shows, in these psalms the sufferer does not confess to sin or regard it as the cause of his suffering. He is ignorant of the cause, and this ignorance itself belongs to the theological assertion of human frailty. The passages that do articulate repentance of sin in psalms of this genre can be shown by redaction-critical considerations to be later additions intended to retool the psalms as liturgies of national penitence.⁷ Lindström does not deal with Job, but I would add that the mindset of these psalms is shared by Job's friends.

When Job and the friends fall silent, Elihu, hitherto silent and unnoted, speaks up. This speech is, in a view I share with many, a later insertion, but it largely agrees with the three friends' understanding of how to achieve reconciliation with God. Lambert is mistaken when he says that "Elihu's speech even identifies a precise method, a practice of confessional prayer, for afflictions' removal."⁸ This is backward. In fact, the relief comes first. Only afterward is prayer possible. In 33:23–28 Elihu recounts a six-step procedure. When a man is sick and on the brink of death, then (step 1) *if* he has an intercessory angel to declare his uprightness (but not sinlessness), *then* (step 2) God will have mercy on him and say he has found a כפר, a redemption payment. It is unclear exactly what this כפר is. Perhaps it is the intercession itself, an angelic declaration of innocence that can be "paid" as a substitute for the punishment. It is important that God's forgiveness does not come gratuitously. Sin is real and must be dealt with; the כפר is an instrument to this end. *Then* (step 3) the sufferer gets well. *Then* (step 4) he beseeches God, and (step 5) God "accepts him—*him*, not his pleas—and restores his rightful status. *Then* (step 6) the man confesses publically that he had sinned and was forgiven. As Elihu puts it, "He sings

7. Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, ConBOT 37 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 440 and ch. 6, passim.

8. Lambert, "Book of Job," 561.

to men and says, 'I sinned and bent what is straight, but it was of no use to me. He redeemed my soul from passing into the Pit, that my life may be in the light of life' (33:27–28). The whole process is a well-scripted drama culminating in public confession. The shame comes at the end, when the suppliant recognizes that he has behaved shamefully toward such a gracious sovereign. In Elihu's account, confession is the upshot of restoration. This is actually a striking confirmation of Lambert's observation that confession is not an act of penitence and does not bring about reconciliation by exposing a sorrowful inner state. Rather, it is an "act of surrender"⁹ that declares and reestablishes the correct hierarchy and as such can follow reconciliation.

In sum, the main issue for the friends, including Elihu, is not theodicy. The friends are not defending God or even rationalizing Job's suffering. For them, God's justice is a simple and obvious fact that may call for reiteration but does not require justification. In a time of crisis, the issue is how sufferers should approach God and find help, receiving the comfort of reconciliation if not necessarily the restoration of prosperity. This is what the friends are trying to teach Job. They are less theologians than pastoral counselors, though clumsy at both. For them, the problem and the solution lie in humans, in the recognition of God's sovereignty beyond question or compromise.

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9. Lambert, "Book of Job," 558.

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Seeing God in the Psalms: The Crisis of Biblical Religion

Stephen A. Geller

Introduction

We shall begin with the exposition of a particularly baffling verse, Ps 17:15, but from there the discussion will expand to present an issue that was most difficult, indeed, impossible, for biblical religion to deal with, namely, direct experience of God. First, however, a necessary distinction must be made between Israelite religion or, more accurately Israelite and Judean religions, on the one hand, and biblical religion, on the other.¹ The former refers to the actual religious practices and beliefs of the historic states of Israel and Judah during their existence, circa 900–600 BCE. The latter refers to the major religious traditions of the document called the Tanak, the Hebrew Bible, especially the Deuteronomic-covenantal tradition and the Priestly-cultic tradition. Biblical religion has roots in the eighth and perhaps even the ninth centuries, but its formulation is basically from the later seventh to fifth centuries, when the primary document of biblical religion, the Pentateuch, was completed. The main problem for biblical scholarship of the past two centuries has been untangling the two, Israelite and Judean religions and biblical religion, because the latter systematically misrepresents and in large part misunderstands the former. (Needless to say, the same applies to understanding biblical religion itself, let alone Israelite and Judean religions, in terms of later Judaism and Christianity.) For example, on a point relevant to the topic of this essay, in Israelite and

It is a great pleasure to offer this essay to the volume honoring my student and former colleague, Edward L. Greenstein, from whom I have learned much more than I taught.

1. Stephen A. Geller, "The Religion of the Bible," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2012–40.

Judean religions the term for making a pilgrimage to the shrine was going “to see God.” Whatever this expression may have meant in reality, experiencing a theophany or even seeing a cultic image of Yahweh, later biblical religion found it unacceptable and changed the active “see God” to passive, “be seen, appear before God,” so that it is the deity who does the seeing. A similar example is in Exod 24:10, which states that Moses, Aaron and his sons, and seventy elders ascended Mount Sinai, where they “saw the God of Israel” (ויראו את אלהי ישראל). But in verse 11 the text rephrases this to “they had a vision of God” (ויחזו את האלהים), making what happened a normal, if one may use that term, prophetic visionary event instead of an unmediated sighting of the deity. It is only through textual analysis and the use of extrabiblical materials from Canaan, Egypt, and, above all, Mesopotamia, that scholars can hope to understand what was really going on. Of course, all analysis of the ancient past is hypothetical and to some extent speculative, which applies to the present discussion as well.

Text: Psalm 17:15

אני בצדק אחזה פניך
אשבעה בהקיץ תמונתך

May I, in vindication, have a vision of your presence [face].²
May I be sated while awake [or: on awakening] with your form.

This verse is a wish, or a request, as is shown by the cohortative ending on אשבעה. The verb חזה means to envision, to have the kind of seeing prophets have, since in standard Biblical Hebrew the term is specialized in meaning as “to have a vision” (though in Aramaic it is the usual term for plain “seeing”). בהקיץ is an infinitive with a preposition, which may be either temporal, “when I awake,” or a simple gerund, “waking, in a waking state.” תמונה, the etymology of which is uncertain but which seems to mean “form” or the like, is used, as here, of an experience of the divine realm, in Job 4:16, where a terrifying spirit appears to Eliphaz in a dream vision. It also appears in the recounting of the Horeb (Sinai) revelation in Deut 4, where great stress is laid on the fact that Israel did not see God’s form, תמונה. The term is also used along with פסל, “hewn image,” in the prohibition against idolatry in both forms of the Ten Commandments, in

2. The Syriac reads “your faithfulness,” but MT is preferable as the *lectio difficilior*.

Exod 20 and Deut 5, well as elsewhere. Most significant is the use of the term תמונה in Num 12, which will be discussed in detail below. (Psalm 16 ends with a similar but less dramatic statement: “There is abundant joy in your presence, / sweet favor at your right hand.” This verse lacks a reference to visions and God’s form, but what will be said here about Ps 17:15 applies to it as well in a general way.)

But what does this verse mean in terms of its religious significance? Is it perhaps simply the statement of a desire to be close to God, a naïve expression of faith and trust? I shall attempt to show that there is nothing simply trustful about the verse and certainly nothing naïve. On the contrary, in its religious setting in its time it was not only complex but also radical and anguished. To capture the complexity, indeed, internal contradiction, of the verse, we shall consider its parts separately, first the A Line of the couplet, then the B Line.

Psalm 17:15a: Beatific Vision or Metaphor?

Psalm 17:15a is one of a number of such statements, or requests, for what some scholars have termed a “beatific vision”: Pss 11:7; 16:11; 17:15; 21:7; 27:4, 13; 36:10; 42:3; 61:8; 63:3, 140:14.³ Some have even termed it an early form of mysticism or a late form of prophecy.⁴ These passages come from different genres (Pss 61 and 63 contain royal elements; the others are individual or communal laments, or petitions). The passages use three key terms, ראה “see,” חזה “envision,” and פנים “face, presence,” in various combinations. Two verses, Pss 61:8 and 140:14, use ישב “remain, dwell” and contain the wish that the king and the upright, respectively, might dwell with God’s “face, presence.” Whether these verses express simple confidence or trust or, like Ps 17:15, wishes and requests is a matter of debate and part of a much larger discussion about the theme of “trust, confidence” in the psalms of petition, especially individual petition.⁵

3. See Mark S. Smith, “‘Seeing God’ in the Psalms: The Background of the Beatific Vision in the Hebrew Bible,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 171–83.

4. For the former, see H. J. Franken, *The Mystical Communion with YHWH in the Book of Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 1954); for the latter, Raymond J. Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem*, trans. J. Edward Crowley, JSOTSup 118 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

5. On the issue see Stephen A. Geller, “The ‘Precative Perfect’ in Psalms and the Struggle for Faith,” in *The Unfolding of Your Words Gives Light: Studies on Biblical*

The “beatific vision” passages are related to another set of requests: to “dwell in God’s house forever.” Aside from Pss 61:8 and 140:14, where the object is God’s presence (פָּנִים), one thinks above all of Pss 23:6 and 27:4 (which is also a “beatific vision” passage). Both of these verses make it clear that permanent “dwelling” with God is the request by the psalmist.

What is one to make of all this? Envisioning God’s presence is normally the prerogative of prophets. Dwelling with God in God’s house is the prerogative of priests, though even they do so only during their watches. Is Ps 17:15 asking for an encounter with God in the prophetic manner, in a vision or dream? Or is it the case that both the requests to see and to dwell forever with God are metaphors for the kind of closeness to the deity described as the highest good in Ps 73:28? Strongly arguing for the metaphorical interpretation is the link between the beatific vision passages and those mentioning a desire to dwell in God’s house forever. The latter are certainly metaphorical rather than literal, since it is clearly impossible in reality even for priests to dwell forever in the temple (unless the house in question is the divine heavenly palace, in which case the image is the same as the beatific vision passages).

Before we attempt to answer the question of metaphor more definitively, we must have a look at the ancient comparative evidence from Egypt and especially Mesopotamia and ask when and how ordinary people there, not priests or kings or prophets, could see the gods.

Experiencing Divinity in the Ancient Near East

Since ancient religion, aside from biblical religion and probably also Israelite religion, was image-focused, one must first ask under what circumstances the ancients encountered the images of their gods and what religious meaning it had for them. One did not simply go into a temple and enter the adytum, where the image stood. Direct contact with images was limited to priests. In Egypt cultic encounter with the divine statues was impossible for nonpriests. To be sure, the images often traveled, and at the festival of Osiris at Abydos they were carried in solemn procession before assembled pilgrims from all over Egypt, but the statues of the gods remained hidden inside their portable shrines. However, the occasion was

Hebrew in Honor of George L. Klein, ed. Ethan C. Jones (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 3–12.

central to public and private devotions, and during the procession written requests for oracles could be submitted to the gods (i.e., the priests), which might be answered by the gods (i.e., the priests). Actual visual contact with divinity was limited to the king and prophets and was in visions or dreams.

In Mesopotamia, the divine images of Marduk and other deities were carried in procession during the New Year festival through the city of Babylon to the shrine of the Bit Akitu. They seem to have been visible to all. Whether this had any devotional significance to the people is unknown. There was no need to submit requests for oracles to them on that occasion. The Mesopotamians had a well-developed set of omen procedures to ascertain the will of the gods. In any case, oracles and prophecy were secondary in Mesopotamia (except at Mari and later in the Neo-Assyrian period). In the third millennium images were set up in shrines (Tell Asmar) that seem to represent worshipers. They have huge, wide-open eyes, and it is difficult not to view them as gazing at the divine in some fashion. But these are images of worshipers, not the people themselves.

But the gods could appear, at least to important people such as kings, in dreams. The most famous example is the dream of Gudea (third millennium) in which the god Ningirsu appeared and ordered him to construct his shrine. In Ludlul Bel Nemeqi, "I Shall Praise the Lord of Wisdom" (second millennium), a poem that deals with theodicy and has been compared to Job, a sufferer complains that he has been abandoned by his personal gods and is appealing over their heads to a higher divinity, who may have been Marduk, with whose praise the poem ends. He recounts a dream in which three figures appeared to him, of whom the first two seem to be divine, perhaps his personal god and goddess.

Most important for the current discussion are the occasional references to "seeing" a deity in prayers and hymns in devotional literature, which in many respects are remarkably similar to the biblical examples. The great Ishtar Hymn (Ishtar 2) is a long prayer for help that contains a mixture of praise and pleas for rescue that is quite similar to the psalms of petition in the Bible. Lines 40–41 state:

Wherever you look, the dead one lives, the sick one arises;
the nonerect one, seeing your face [*āmiru paniki*], becomes erect.⁶

6. Translations suggested to me by Tzvi Abusch. Anna Elise Zerneck's treatment of the Ishtar Hymn may be found in Alan Lenzi, ed., *Reading Akkadian Prayers*

There is nothing to indicate under what circumstances the seeing occurs, whether in a vision, in a dream, standing before an image or the actual morning star, or otherwise. Somewhat more illuminating is a passage from a shuilla prayer to Nergal. In Tzvi Abusch's arrangement and translation:

Because you are sparing, my lord, I have turned toward your divinity,
 Because you are compassionate, I have sought you,
 Because you are merciful, I have stood before you,
 Because you are favorably inclined, I have looked upon your face [*ātamar panika*].⁷

The language used here does seem to suggest progressive approach to a deity or an image of the deity. But where? In a temple or a dream? On a rooftop, gazing at the planet Mars, which was identified with Nergal?⁸ Or are the references to seeing in the Ishtar and Nergal hymns to be taken as metaphor based on the cult, as it was suggested for the biblical example? In a prayer to Shamash the petitioner states, "I stand before you, I seize your hem."⁹ The latter is certainly an idiom for asking divine protection, and the image is clearly metaphorical. As often, the comparative evidence is equivocal, but in my opinion it suggests that reference in prayers to visual encounter with the deity is as much a figurative expression, if possibly cult derived, as the biblical examples seem to be.

As metaphors, both "seeing God" and "dwelling with him forever" can be seen as images derived from the actual ancient practice in Israelite and Judean religions of pilgrimage to the temple. "Seeing God" might be a heightening of the old traditional formula, mentioned above, of pilgrimage as going to "see God" on "the mountain where he can be seen" (Gen 22:14). What this idiom might actually have meant in older religion is uncertain. Part of the rationale of pilgrimages worldwide is that they bring one closer to divinity spiritually as well as spatially. That pilgrimages in any culture can stimulate an individual or even a group visionary experience is well-attested. Even later, in the Second Temple period, individuals may have had such experiences. But I think that by the time of developed bibli-

and Hymns: An Introduction, ANEM 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 257–90.

7. In Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers*, 348; see also 341.

8. Lenzi (*Reading Akkadian Prayers*, 32) suggests an outdoor setting for shuilla prayers.

9. In Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers*, 429.

cal religion both dwelling and seeing would have become metaphors of the temple-centered piety of the psalms. Part of the evidence for this shift is the linguistic change, mentioned above, from the earlier going “to see God” to the later “to be seen by/before God.”

Metaphorical or not, Ps 17:15a still falls within the boundaries of the other beatific vision passages in the Psalter and is nothing remarkable in itself. It is the second part of the verse, 17:15b, that breaks all bounds and steps outside the realm of standard biblical imagery and belief.

Psalms 17:15b: “Awake May I Be Sated with Your Form”

To understand the complexity of this half of the verse, and the contradiction contained in it, we must examine briefly the two terms used: (1) בהקיץ “awake” and (2) תמונה “form.”

Psalms 17:15a speaks of a vision, but in 15b the phrase בהקיץ seems to contradict that. How is one to understand this phrase? Does it imply that the psalmist is hoping to see God when he awakens from his night’s sleep, perhaps after much nocturnal agitation and anxiety? This is the way בהקיץ is interpreted by most translations and commentaries, namely, as temporal, “when I awake,” presumably in the morning. This reading seems to imply a link to the important theme in the Psalter of בקר “morning,” the hope or expectation of receiving God’s response to prayers, uttered in a night of anguish, “in the morning, or at the “light” (אור) or “dawn” (שחר; see, e.g., Pss 5:4; 46:6).¹⁰

Some connect this reference to “morning” with a supposed seat in life in cultic incubation, the oracular practice mentioned in Egyptian, Hittite, Mesopotamian, and classical texts of spending the night at or near a shrine in order to receive an oracle or divine instruction of some sort. The practice is perhaps alluded to in the Hebrew Bible in 1 Sam 3, where the child Samuel sleeps in the shrine at Shiloh and receives a divine message. But there the message was unsought, and in my view it is unlikely that “morning” in the context of the Psalms refers to incubation. Rather, it is more likely that saying that relief, joy, happiness come after a night of anguish is a metaphor rooted in the universal dichotomy of darkness and light.

10. Bernd Janowski, *Rettungsgewissheit und Epiphanie des Heils: Das Motiv der Hilfe Gottes “am Morgen” im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1989).

Darkness is suffering, sin, anxiety, and light is divine presence, happiness, rescue, and so on.

Others think the reference to morning is to the rising of the sun in the morning. Such scholars tend to be among those who view solar language as central to the theophany of Yahweh.¹¹ Psalm 17:15b would therefore be talking about “waking” in the morning, specifically at sunrise. The light imagery applied to Yahweh regularly in the Bible refers, they hold, not to general radiance and nimbus, but to Yahweh’s essence as a solar god. But Yahweh as a solar deity has direct biblical support in one verse only, Ps 84:12: “Yahweh is a sun [שמש] and a shield.” However, the text is not above suspicion (שמש here is probably a rare term for “battlement,” as in Isa 54:12). To be sure, there is much solar imagery in Israelite iconography, especially in the eighth century,¹² but its actual religious significance is debated. The winged sun disc was an especially common symbol in the period of Israelite and Judean religions as well as elsewhere in the contemporary ancient Near East and may be referred to in Mal 3:20: “the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings.” But imagery drawn from light and even sunlight used to describe God’s blessing, as in the Priestly blessing in Num 6:25, “may his face shine upon you,” is, in my view, too susceptible of other interpretations simply to make the aggressive and violent storm god Yahweh into a solar deity (though metaphors based on the sun are certainly possible).

To me it seems that בִּהְיָיָקִי should not be regarded as a temporal clause, “when I awake,” but literally “in wakefulness,” that is, not in a vision. It is true that visions are distinguished from dreams in developed biblical religion. Jeremiah characterized the false prophets as having dreams and not true visions, which are ecstatic experiences (Jer 23). But both in early times and in late and postbiblical literature the distinction was not meaningful. I suspect that biblical religion has distorted that actual role of dreams in Israelite and Judean religions for theological reasons and, as well, purposefully downplayed the truly ecstatic experiences of the “classical” prophets. By the time of apocalyptic literature, like Daniel, dreams and visions are almost the same: nocturnal divine communications.

11. J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSup 111 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

12. See especially pages 248–60 in Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

Now in a vision, that is, a trance, a prophet enters into the realm of the divine. But to outsiders he may appear asleep, even dead. When the spirit of God descends on Saul, he falls to the ground in what looks like a stupor (1 Sam 19:24). Balaam calls himself the one who sees God's visions, "fallen down, yet with uncovered eye," outwardly unconscious but with inner eye open to the world of the divine (Num 24:4). Therefore, asking, as Ps 17:15b does, for a vision in a waking state is a contradiction in terms so great that I think it confirms that the requests for divine experience in Ps 17:15 and probably in the other beatific vision passages in the Psalter, along with the references to "dwelling forever," are very likely to be taken as metaphorical. Even if one takes *בהקיץ* to refer to awakening from sleep, prophetic or otherwise, the statement in Ps 17:15 is still astonishing: "May I have a vision of your presence and, on awakening, be sated with [gazing on] your form!" This statement could hardly be taken as anything other than metaphorical, as a powerful wish for closeness and unmediated access to God. But to comprehend the radical audacity of the verse more fully, we must examine the other term in 17:15b, *תמונה* "form."

Numbers 12 and Moses, the Super-Prophet Who Sees the Divine Form

An important passage in regard to Ps 17:15b is Num 12:6–8. In a somewhat confusing attempt to distinguish Moses from other prophets, it is asserted that Moses's revelations are not obscure "riddles," like those of other prophets, communicated to them by God in dreams. Rather, alone among the prophets he "gazes at the form of God" (*תמונת יי ביט*) and speaks to him in a normal way, as one person speaks to another (*פה אל פה*). Although the standard term for prophetic vision, *חזון*, is not used at all in Num 12, the passage seems to be trying to distinguish Moses from all other prophets. They see God in dreams, or dream visions, and their messages are obscure (one thinks of the Delphic oracle). Moses speaks clearly because he speaks with God in a normal state of consciousness, "mouth to mouth." This sense is confirmed by Deut 34:10, which says that no later prophet equaled Moses, who spoke to God "face to face." The phrase also appears in Deut 5:4, where it is stated that Israel as a people had actual visual experience of God's revelation at Sinai (see also Exod 33:23).

In the light of Num 12, Ps 17:15b seems to be asking for nothing else than an encounter with God's person, not just in a prophetic vision, as in the first part of the verse, but, as the second part amazingly requests, in a fully wakened state: "May I envision your presence." Now experience of

God, whether in visions or, even more so, directly, is highly dangerous. Prophets can have visions of God in the heavenly court, surrounded by angels, cherubim, and seraphim (Isa 6; Ezek 1; see also 1 Kgs 22; Zech 3), but the experience, risky in the extreme, is characterized by a light so blinding that they dare not look at the Deity itself. If they did so, they would be smitten. Despite what Num 12 says, another passage, Exod 33:20, holds that even Moses was not allowed to see God's glory, the radiance around his body, directly, but only its afterglow, as it were, "for no one may see me and live." We know from several biblical passages that direct encounter with the divine, even an angel, is dangerous, risking death (e.g., Exod 33; Isa 6; Judg 13; Gen 32). So what could Ps 17:15 have in mind? Does the psalmist want to risk death from the experience?

The psalmist has enormously raised the ante for his request. He wants not only a vision of God but, contradictorily, one in a waking state, and not of some general nimbus or dim afterglow but of the divine form, that is, God's body itself. He is like Moses, the super-prophet. Surely this is hubris bordering on blasphemy. In what kind of circumstance could someone say something like Ps 17:15a and especially b?

The Religious Setting: The Crisis of Experience in Biblical Religion

If Ps 17:15 is a radical metaphor, into what religious and historical setting does it fit? The starting point must be the situation of the presumed date of Ps 17. Like most of the Psalter, aside from earlier outliers such as Pss 29 and 68 and the royal psalms, I take that date to be the sixth–fourth centuries BCE, with most psalms composed or edited in the fifth. This is the period of the early Second Temple, of the books of Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah, and, above all, of the editing and promulgation of the Pentateuch.

There were three major undertakings by the returned exilic community, reflected in major sets of documents. The first was the restoration of the temple and its cult. The second was the related elimination of the monarchy from theology as well as reality. The third, and most relevant to this essay, was the clarification of the relatively new absolute monotheism and its incorporation in a book religion, which meant that prophecy as a living institution had to be eliminated. The extreme focus on textualization of experience meant that what was not written was not true, if truth is defined as permanence, so even the visual and auditory experiences of acceptable past prophets had to become books. The formation of

the canonical Psalter was part of this process. It was intended to present models of monotheistic prayer for study as text and for instruction in approved types of devotion. It was the Book of Common Prayer of the Second Temple, as it were.

But lived religion could not tolerate such a narrow focus on text as the only legitimate form of contact, as indirect as it is, with God, and even in these approved psalms something deeper sometimes breaks out, reflected, I think in the prophetic-like references to seeing God in the psalms. These must be viewed in the larger religious dimensions of the period in question, which was a time of grave theological conflict and crisis. Radical monotheism produced benefits in terms of group cohesion and therefore survival. It offered the individual a unity of purpose that gave a new kind of meaning to human life. Its incorporation in timeless text was a tidy replacement for the slippery, elusive myths of older religions and the eccentricities of prophecy. But there was a great price. Above all, the concretization of religious experience in texts of the past, and the exclusion of living prophecy, meant that believers were cut off from overwhelming direct experience of the numinous, producing trembling yet also fascination, which as Rudolf Otto said is the core religious experience, without which the rest is mere form. Psalm 17:15 is an extreme example of the frustration at such exclusion from direct experience of the divine. The psalmist seems to raise his demand to an absurd and perhaps self-contradictory level, in what I regard as a deliberately provocative statement asking to see God not just in the usual prophetic trance but in a waking state, like Moses. It is the historical religious context that explains the boldness of Ps 17:15, as well as the other, somewhat less extreme, passages that speak of seeing God and dwelling with God forever.

I think general corroboration of the general lines of my interpretation of the references to seeing God in the psalms comes from the book of Job, which was contemporary to many of the psalms. The book of Job expresses similar frustration at the lack of direct contact with God in book religion, specifically in regard to the issue of theodicy and divine justice. Job is quite as radical and even blasphemous as we have posited the psalmist in 17:15 to have been. Significantly, seeing God plays a central role in the book. Whatever the "solution" to theodicy offered by the book of Job, there is no doubt as to how it was presented. Job forced God into a theophany, and he has not only heard the divine speeches but has seen the manifestation of the deity in, or as, a whirling storm cloud. "Formerly I had heard of you with the hearing of the ears, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5; see

also especially 19:26–27). Seeing is believing. The crisis in experience and consequent longing for it is at the heart of Job. The theodicy issue is only an outward concomitant circumstance.

I do not think the psalmist in Ps 17:15 is blasphemous but rather tortured. He has crafted a contradictory and radical demand to highlight his frustration. This does not involve just the lack of divine contact, which is the general issue in most of the biblical and other ancient laments and petitions. Rather, the frustration is over the absence even of the *possibility* of direct contact with God in the new postexilic dispensation. Psalm 17:15 is a document of its time, however much later pieties misunderstood it as a simple statement of unquestioning faith.

The frustrated longing for closeness and experience, expressed most forcibly as “seeing God,” found powerful expression in the postbiblical period in the underground genre of apocalyptic, a fervid blend of wisdom and prophecy. In apocalyptic visions the eye plays a dominant role, gazing on the divine realm, on mysterious apparitions and symbols. Another later and never quite orthodox visual tradition was mysticism, the sighting of the divine palace, its supernatural denizens, and, ultimately, God. But the central crisis of frustration in book religion remains: how to gain direct access to the Divine Author who gave it.

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“Evil” or “Agitated”: The Meaning of רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17

Dominick S. Hernández

1. On Reading and Rereading Job

Reading the poetic sections of Job is a perpetual exercise in retrospective patterning.¹ Throughout the reading experience, the reader gathers information, organizes it, and creates expectations with regard to what might follow. The expectations, however, do not remain static; experiencing a poem is a temporal activity, not a spatial enterprise in which one simply recognizes an assortment of written characters.² As one continues in the poem and more information is gathered, the reader is constantly in the process of readjusting interpretations of text that has already been read and expectations for the text ahead.

I write this essay in honor of my mentor and friend, Professor Edward L. Greenstein, who served as my doctoral advisor at Bar-Ilan University from 2011 to 2016. I am deeply appreciative of Professor Greenstein’s comprehensive guidance from the commencement of the doctoral application process through my professional career. Professor Greenstein is a world-class scholar whose academic grandeur is surpassed only by his humility and respect for fellow human beings. His example has undoubtedly instructed me more about kindness than scholarship. I dedicate this paper to him, in an endeavor to honor him out of gratitude for all that he has accomplished and, more importantly, for the exemplary person that he has been to me and to others.

1. For an explanation of “retrospective patterning,” see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 10–14. Smith’s explanation focuses on expectations at the end of a poem. I suggest that this way of reading applies more broadly to Job because of the book’s unique language.

2. Edward L. Greenstein, “Bildad Lectures Job: A Close Reading of Job 8,” in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading*, ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63–64.

The poetry of Job presents a unique challenge to the interpreter. The language is highly specialized,³ yet it is discernible in most cases through close attention to the phonology, morphology, syntax, and poetics of the text.⁴ Nevertheless, even after assiduous scrutiny of the fine points of any given text in Job, there can exist peculiarities that call one's translation and, thereby, interpretation of the text into question. At times, even after laborious examination of a text in Job, our subsequent expectations relating to the composition are foiled, and we are forced to reread and readjust our perception of the text we so arduously examined.

One of the dominant catalysts that provokes readers to readjust their perceptions of previously read texts in the poetry of Job is the sophisticated usage of multivariant words.⁵ The poetic sections of Job thrive on odd usage of apparently known words as well as polysemy⁶ that readers must discern in order to make good sense of sections of the book.⁷ A reader of Job might skim over a word, noting its conventional meaning, but, upon continuing to read and upon expectations being frustrated, the reader may become cognizant of the fact that the given word was not properly understood in its original context. Accordingly, readers are compelled to reread and to adjust, not only their perceptions of previous texts but, in Job, their comprehension of the layers of meaning of the particular words.

This is indeed the case for רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17, a word that is almost universally understood to refer to the “wicked.” This is the usual and therefore

3. See Edward L. Greenstein, “The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 651–66.

4. See Edward L. Greenstein, “Challenges in Translating the Book of Job,” in *Found in Translation: Essays on Jewish Biblical Translation in Honor of Leonard J. Greenspoon*, ed. James W. Barker, Anthony Le Donne, and Joel N. Lohr (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018), 182.

5. See, e.g., Greenstein's treatment of the Hebrew word גִּלְמוֹד in 3:7, which carries the double meanings of sterile (see BDB, 166) and “a solitary rock” (based upon the Arabic cognate noun *julmūd*). This verse can be intelligibly read twice in order (1) to portray Job's wish for the night of his conception to have been sterile as well as (2) to depict Job's wish for this day to be isolated from all other days (Greenstein, “Language of Job,” 656). See also Edward L. Greenstein, “Job,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1500–1501.

6. Greenstein, “Challenges in Translating,” 186.

7. See especially the six challenges to translation that Greenstein lists on “Challenges in Translating,” 181–83.

default meaning of the well-attested word רָשָׁע “wicked, a wicked person,” following the traditional lexical definition of words related to רָשָׁע “to act wickedly.”⁸ However, in the context of 3:17 the “wicked” is inapt. First, this meaning simply does not make sense in its context, since there is no other allusion to the issue of the righteous and the wicked in Job 3. Second, the “wicked” do not have anything to do with the trembling that is suggested by the term רָגַז “turmoil, agitation”⁹ that serves as the direct object of the phrase in verse 17a. Third, an examination of the root רָשָׁע in a verbal form in Job 34:29 foils any expectations the reader might have of רָשָׁע meaning “wicked” in 3:17. Readers are thereby compelled to reread Job 3:17, adjust their translation, and reinterpret the passage.

In this paper I discuss the peculiar literary context in which רָשָׁעִים appears in Job 3:17 and examine the inner-biblical evidence relating to the significance of the word. An investigation into the word רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17 within its immediate context not only yields an unexpected result but also foreshadows the perpetual need to carefully decipher rhetoric throughout Job and to adjust one’s conventional readings of familiar terms when constrained by context. I conclude this paper with a working hypothesis of the semantic development that explains why words related to רָשָׁע have occasionally taken on a meaning related to restlessness.

1.1. Summary and the Traditional Understanding of רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17

Indeed, “the book of Job is a rhetorical drama in which Job and his companions try to get to the root of the exemplary Job’s afflictions.”¹⁰ Job’s friends’ inquiry begins decently, as in their first speeches both Eliphaz and Bildad strive to encourage Job to return to God. Nevertheless, by the second round of speeches Job’s companions equate his tragic fate with that of the wicked. From their understanding of a universal and immutable system of divine retribution, the friends assume that correlation equals causation. Job’s fate appears to correspond with the consequences that people suffer for wickedness; therefore, Job must be wicked.

Likening Job’s situation to that of the wicked is so ubiquitous in the first and (especially) second rounds of speeches that the essence of the companions’ arguments is accessible to any reader. However, identifying

8. BDB, s.v. “רָשָׁע” 957–58; HALOT, s.v. “רָשָׁע” 1295.

9. BDB, s.v. “רָגַז” 919.

10. Greenstein, “Bildad Lectures Job,” 63.

the passages that specifically relate to the fate of the wicked and following this thread of discussion between Job and his companions are less straightforward tasks, though they are essential to interpreting the discourse in the first two rounds of dialogues.¹¹ A reasonable starting point to such an analysis is naturally Job 3:17, which is the first passage in which the root רשע appears:

BHS: שָׁם רְשָׁעִים חָדְלוּ רָגֹז וְשָׁם יָנוּחוּ יְגִיעֵי כַח:

NRSV: There the **wicked** cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.

NJPS: There the **wicked** cease from troubling; There rest those whose strength is spent.

The traditional approach of most commentators and Bible translations is to render the word רְשָׁעִים as “wicked,” suggesting that verse 17a indicates that the “wicked” cease troubling/turmoil/raging (חָדְלוּ רָגֹז) in the realm of the dead.¹² Following this line of interpretation for verse 17a, Job is saying that, if he were to die, he would be with the “wicked,” who also find rest as a result of ceasing troublesome activity. Nevertheless, the context and usage of רְשָׁעִים in Job 3:17 indicate that the word bears a different meaning.

11. My doctoral dissertation, written under Professor Greenstein’s supervision at Bar-Ilan University, contends that the fate of the wicked is a major source of chagrin to Job and becomes gradually more disconcerting to him, as his friends progress from comparing his fate to that of the wicked (first round of dialogues) to accusing him as wicked (second round of dialogues). Job answers their accusations in an extended diatribe concerning the prosperity of the wicked in Job 21, where he specifically references the major themes and imagery his friends mention during their speeches. See Dominick S. Hernández, “Will the Lamp of the Wicked Wane? The Prosperity of the Wicked in the Book of Job and other Ancient Near Eastern Literature” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2016), especially 220–76.

12. See, e.g., the ESV, KJV, ASV, and NIV translations of the Bible as well as the following commentaries: Víctor Morla, *Libro de Job: Recóndita Armonía*, (Estella, Navarra, Spain: Verbo Divino, 2017), 134; C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 313; Luis Alonso Schökel and J. L. Sicre Díaz, *Job: Comentario Teológico y Literario*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 2002), 145; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 68; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 96; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 99.

1.2. Problem 1: The Immediate Context of Job 3:17

It is reasonable to suggest that the broader context of Job leading up to 3:17 points away from the word רָשָׁע referring to the wicked. As Job raises his voice in chapter 3, he expresses that he would rather “be dead than to live with affliction,”¹³ cursing the day of his birth (3:3) and exclaiming that he wishes he would have been stillborn, never having seen light (3:11–12, 16).¹⁴ Job reflects upon what the underworld would be like had he perished and envisions it as a place of rest from his present calamities (3:13–19). There, Job claims in 3:13a, he would be quiet (שָׁקֵט), implying the calming of his current distress. This implication is confirmed in 3:13b, where the verb אֶשְׁקֵט “I would be quiet” is set in parallel to the phrase יָנוּחַ לִי “it would be at rest for me.”

In the realm of the dead, there are people of all different earthly social standings who evidently meet the same fate, as conveyed by Job’s belief that he would be privileged to enjoy the company of nobility (3:14–15, 17–19). This depiction of the greatest to the lowliest together in the realm of the dead portrays Job’s notion that all are able to find freedom and rest after death. This is corroborated by the fact that Job states in 3:17b that the weary are able to rest (יָנוּחוּ) in the netherworld. The repetition of the verb *rest* (נוח) in 3:13 and 17 emphasizes the fact that Job perceives the netherworld as a sanctuary from his intolerable life. This perception is confirmed through the usage of נוח once again in Job’s final statement in his monologue (3:26), in which he complains that he has not been able to experience peace and quiet or any semblance of rest (וְלֹא־נִחָתִי) because of his perpetual turmoil (רָגַז).

A cursory reading of Job 3 indicates that the main focus of the chapter is Job’s desire to be relieved from his turmoil. Job is not particularly interested in discussing the fate of the wicked with his companions at this point. In fact, Job refrains from broaching any topic related to wickedness or divine retribution upon the wicked, which markedly pervade

13. Greenstein, “Bildad Lectures Job,” 65.

14. For further reading on the light imagery in Job, see James L. Crenshaw, *Reading Job: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 48; and Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, JSOTSup 112 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 102. The dichotomy between light representing life and darkness representing death is mentioned again by Bildad in 18:5–6, 18.

the dialogues elsewhere (see, e.g., Job 11; 15; 18; 20–22). Correspondingly, there is no indication that the subjects of righteousness versus wickedness, and their respective consequences, arise up to this point in the book. In fact, the usage of words similar in meaning to רָשָׁע is conspicuously absent. For example, the terms חֲנֹף “godless” (Job 8:13; 13:16; 15:34; 17:8; 20:5; 27:8; 34:30; 36:13), עָרִיץ “ruthless” (6:23; 15:20; 27:13), or שְׂכַחֵי אֵל “forgetters of God” (8:13), which are likened to the word רָשָׁע in other sections of Job, do not appear in this context. Wickedness (רָעָה, 2:11; 20:12; 22:5; 42:11) in general does not emerge as a theme in chapter 3. Knowing that these words and concepts pervade other sections of Job relating to the wicked, it would be sensible to expect them to surface in Job’s monologue if the word רָשָׁע in 3:17 refers to the wicked as it does in other parts of the book.¹⁵

In chapter 3, Job is concentrated on attaining serenity amidst his personal tragedies. He mentions the רָשָׁעִים in his expression of this desire and yet does not refer to any of the terms that one would expect in the context of a discussion concerning the wicked and/or wickedness. These observations imply that Job’s monologue does not introduce the topic of wickedness. In fact, reading Job 3:17 in the context of Job’s monologue provokes the observant reader to reexamine the actual meaning of the word רָשָׁעִים.

1.3. Problem 2: The Apparent Parallelism

Questions concerning the traditional interpretation of רָשָׁעִים as the “wicked” arise not only through understanding the verse in the context of the entire monologue; the apparent parallelism between lines 3:17a–b also proves to be problematic. Simply stated, rendering the רָשָׁעִים as the “wicked” in 3:17a does not make sense when taking 3:17b into consideration as a parallel statement:

3:17a: שָׁם רָשָׁעִים חָדְלוּ רָגֹז

3:17b: וְשָׁם יָנוּחוּ יִגְיַעֵי בָח

15. Despite accepting the traditional definition of רָשָׁע, Clines concedes, “for a book that is so dominated by intellectual issues of theodicy, it is amazing to find here (chapter 3) not one strictly theological sentence, not a single question about the meaning of his suffering, not a hint that it may be deserved, not the slightest nod to the doctrine of retribution” (Clines, *Job 1–20*, 104).

A problem arises with labeling the רָשָׁעִים as the “wicked” in the immediate context of the verse because the phrase חָדְלוּ רָגֹז “they cease turmoil”¹⁶ is similar in meaning to the word נָנוּחוּ “they rest.” This might not seem to be of great consequence at first glance, but suspicion of direct parallelism between the two lines arises upon further observing that the word שָׁם “there” (i.e., the netherworld) is located in the first position of both of the lines of verse 17. Hence, if שָׁם is in the first position in both lines of the verse and the phrase חָדְלוּ רָגֹז is similar in meaning to the word נָנוּחוּ, it is reasonable to expect the remaining parts—the word רָשָׁעִים in 3:17a and the phrase יָגִיעַ כַּח “weary of strength” in 3:17b—to be corresponding terms. If the weary (יָגִיעַ כַּח) are depicted as resting in the realm of the dead and the רָשָׁעִים are unambiguously parallel to them, then evidently the רָשָׁעִים also find some sort of rest in the realm of the dead.

Before continuing, it is important to note how reading the entirety of the verse in context forces readers to reread the text and adjust their expectations with regard to what it is actually saying. After a cursory reading of verse 17a, the reader might understand the רָשָׁעִים to mean the “wicked,” which is a reasonable translation. However, once the reader realizes (1) that שָׁם is in the same position in both of the lines of the verse, (2) that the phrase חָדְלוּ רָגֹז is similar in meaning to the word נָנוּחוּ, and (3) that רָשָׁעִים is undoubtedly in direct parallel of יָגִיעַ כַּח, sensitive readers are forced to adjust their understanding of the word רָשָׁעִים to a meaning more suitable for the immediate and broader contexts.

At this point, the context of verse 17 seems to indicate that the רָשָׁעִים are those who are relieved of turmoil (רָגֹז) as opposed to רָשָׁעִים referring to the “wicked,” those who *cause* turmoil. Ibn Ezra already suggested that the רָשָׁעִים in this context are those who experience turmoil, demonstrated through physical agitation, when stating, “הם המתנועעים חדלו,”¹⁷ Ibn Ezra’s interpretation of the רָשָׁעִים to refer to the מתנועעים

16. See the transitive usage of the verb חָדַל in the sense of “to cease” (BDB, 292) or “to give something up” (HALOT, 292) in Judg 9:9, 11, 13.

17. See Mariano Gómez Aranda, *El Comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al Libro de Job: Edición Crítica, Traducción y Estudio Introductorio*, Literatura Hispano-Hebrea 6 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Instituto de Filología, 2004), 33 n. 1; and Edward L. Greenstein, “Features of Language in the Poetry of Job,” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verita vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. Thomas Krüger, ATANT 88 (Zürich: TVZ, 2007), 91–92.

“the trembling/shaking ones”¹⁸ who are relieved of their agitation clarifies the parallelism between the two lines in 3:17. Likewise, others have noticed the contextual difficulties in rendering רָשָׁעִים as “wicked”—particularly because the context suggests that the רָשָׁעִים cease some sort of movement in the realm of the dead. In order to solve this conundrum, it has been suggested that רָשָׁעִים be emended to רָעָשִׁים “the ones who quake/shake,”¹⁹ thereby maintaining the unambiguous parallelism between the two lines and providing a more intelligible reading than the conventional translations.

Despite this sensitivity to context, there are at least two reasons why this suggested emendation is misguided. First, רָשָׁעִים is the *lectio difficilior* and should be retained unless there is a conclusive reason to emend the text. In this case, however, it is apparent that the major versions understood the Hebrew *Vorlage* to read רָשָׁעִים (see, e.g., OG ἄσεβεις from ἄσεβής, “ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious,” and Latin *impii* from *impius*, “wicked, impious”). Thus, there is no major reason in the versions to doubt the reading of the MT.

Additionally, words related to רָעַשׁ are relatively common in the Hebrew Bible, yet the inflected form of this suggested emendation (masculine plural participle) appears only once in the Bible. In Jer 4:24, the prophet states, “I saw the mountains and, behold, they were shaking” (רָעָשִׁים). It is important to note here that this conjugation is only found modifying an inanimate object.²⁰ This seems to be the pattern for the usage of רָעַשׁ in the *qal* paradigm, with the “earth” frequently serving as its subject.²¹ Emending a text that is supported by the versions to an inflected form that appears only once in the Bible, modifying an inanimate object, seems imprudent. A more judicious course of action is to reexamine the present text and strive to explain it based upon the contextual clues.

18. See נֹוֹעַ in BDB, 631, as well as in Jastrow, 888.

19. See, e.g., Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 64.

20. Alonso Schökel and Díaz, *Job*, 148.

21. For examples of אָרָץ as the subject, see Judg 5:4; 2 Sam 22:8; Isa 13:13; Jer 8:16; 10:10; 49:21; 51:29; Pss 18:8; 68:9; 77:19. See Isa 24:18 for מוֹסְדֵי אָרָץ; Ezek 26:10 for חוֹמוֹתֶיךָ; 26:15 for הָאֲיִים; 27:28 for מְגִרְשׁוֹת; Joel 2:10 for שָׁמַיִם; 4:16 for שָׁמַיִם וָאָרָץ; Amos 9:1 for הַקְּפִים; Nah 1:5 and Ps 46:4 for הָרִים. An exception to this observation includes Ezek 38:20, where humankind is listed with the animals of the world.

1.4. Problem 3: Inner-Biblical Evidence—Job 3:13; 34:29; and Isaiah 14:3

Prior to proceeding in the analysis, further contextual insight can be gained by briefly returning to Job 3:13. In this verse Job expresses his desire to lie down and be quiet by stating, “For now I would lie down and be quiet” (כִּי-עֲתָה שָׁכַבְתִּי וְאַשְׁקוּט). This yearning is paralleled with the ambiguous phrase אֶזְנֵי יָנוּחַ לִי (lit. “I will sleep, then it will rest for me”). It is interesting that the third masculine singular *qal* form of the verb נוח is used here, as opposed to Job simply stating, “I will rest” (אֶנְנוּחַ). Additionally, one might expect the *hiphil* paradigm to indicate that something previously mentioned would cause Job to rest (i.e., יָנִיחַ לִי) from his current anguish. It seems that in verse 13 Job is stating that in lying down (שָׁכַב), becoming quiet (שָׁקֵט), and sleeping (יָשָׁן), he will achieve some rest, but the reader is left with the question: From what exactly will Job receive his rest?

The next clue is in verse 17, where the verb נוח is used once again (יָנִיחוּ). At first glance, it is not exactly clear from what the weary rest in the netherworld. However, as Greenstein has pointed out, “the meaning of many expressions and phrases in Job depends on a close acquaintance with the Hebrew literary tradition.”²² Thus, at this point a look at Isa 14:3a is instructive. It reads, “and it will be, in the day the LORD causes you to rest [וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְךָ] from your pain and from your turmoil [וּמִרְגָּזְךָ].” Here the verb נוח is used with the preposition ל and an object pronoun to bring about rest from turmoil (רָגַז). This is the same pattern found in Job 3:13 (יָנִיחַ לִי), but the subject of the verb is not explicitly mentioned. As the reader continues through verse 17, however, it becomes apparent that Job claims that he would rest from turmoil (רָגַז) in the realm of the dead. The term רָגַז of verse 17 serves as the direct object of the verb חָדְלוּ,²³ referring to a condition that ceases in the netherworld, and simultaneously functions as the unmentioned subject of יָנִיחַ לִי in verse 13. That is, as the reader comes across more information concerning Job’s depiction of the realm of the dead in verse 17, it becomes easier to understand the apparently subject-less phrase יָנִיחַ לִי in verse 13, which conveys that from which Job seeks rest. Job desires tranquility from his turmoil just like the רָשָׁעִים find repose from their agitation in the realm of the dead.

22. Greenstein, “Challenges in Translating,” 188.

23. See GKC §63k for the accusative after חָדַל in Job 3:17 instead of the expected מִן.

Occasionally, it is not until much later in a composition that the reader obtains sufficient information to reflect upon and reinterpret an earlier text. In the case of the רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17, the immediate context of the passage is an ample reason to call the traditional meaning of “wicked” into question. However, if there is any doubt that the conventional meaning of רָשָׁעִים should be reconsidered, this suspicion must be abandoned by the time the reader arrives at Job 34:29. Particularly significant in reevaluating the meaning of the רָשָׁעִים in 3:17 is the manner in which שקט and רשע are used together in Job 34:29:²⁴

וְהוּא יִשְׁקֵט וּמִי יִרְשַׁע (29a)

וְיִסְתֵּר פָּנָיו וּמִי יִשׁוּרְנוֹ (29b)

וְעַל-גּוֹי וְעַל-אָדָם יָחֵד (29c)

29a. If he makes quiet, who can agitate?

29b. If he hides (his) face, who can see him?

29c. He is over the nation and the person alike.

The location of the conjunctive phrase וּמִי in both 29a and 29b indicates a relationship between the lines, though the dissimilar meanings of the words in these lines suggests that they are not intended to be read with the same effect. It appears that the function of the phrase וּמִי in line b is to juxtapose two opposite actions. That is to say, the hiding of the face (יִסְתֵּר פָּנָיו) is the opposite of seeing/ beholding him (יִשׁוּרְנוֹ), which is preceded by the phrase וּמִי. Given the clarity of this line, it is probable that the phrase וּמִי serves the same syntactical function in verse 29a. This means that the verb יִרְשַׁע should be understood as the opposite action of the verb יִשְׁקֵט.

Since the verb יִשְׁקֵט points to God quieting and functions as the antonym of יִרְשַׁע, the sense of the question presented is: “If [God] makes quiet [יִשְׁקֵט], who can disquiet [יִרְשַׁע]?” The verbal root רשע in the *hiphil* is used in the sense of bringing the opposite effect of quieting, with no connotation of wickedness implied through this question.²⁵ This observation suggests that the root, and its corresponding substantival

24. See discussion in Greenstein, “Features of Language,” 91–92. The following translation is mine.

25. Other translations of 34:29a include a rendering of רשע that pertains to condemning. See, e.g., Morla, *Libro de Job*, 1167; Alonso Schökel and Díaz, *Job*, 587; Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Book of Job: Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (New York: Norton, 1998), 135; Hartley, *Job*, 456; Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 14 (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 274; Marvin H. Pope,

words, do not invariably denote wickedness. In the context of Job 34:29, the רָשָׁע refers to disquieting/unsettling or perhaps agitating. Taking this into consideration, the word רשע depicting someone who is agitated and therefore restless is indeed a plausible solution to its seemingly odd usage (רָשָׁעִים) in 3:17.

As is the case with Job 3:17, some commentators have noticed that רשע cannot mean “wicked” in the context of 34:29 and have suggested a meaning related to agitation. For example, Rabbi Samuel ben R. Nissim Masnuth (Aleppo, ca. 1300) in his commentary on Job (מעין גנים) recognizes that in 34:29 הרשיע must mean “to be noisy, agitated” in opposition to השקיט, which is in reference to the outcries of the poor in the preceding verse. Upon this realization, Rabbi Samuel ben R. Nissim Masnuth remarkably comments: “כמו ירעיש שהוא תמורתו ישקיט, והוא כמו שמלה, ושלמה: ד”א שהוא כמו ובכל אשר יפנה ירשיע (ש”א יד מז), ר”ל כשהוא משקיט ולאותן הדלים מאותן הרשעים מי ירשיעם עוד.”²⁶

Unlike the suggested emendation from רשע to רעש in order to clarify רשע in the contexts of Job 3:17 and 34:29,²⁷ this explanation uniquely suggests that הרשיע is a phonological metathesis of הרעיש, “cause to shudder.” This observation is based on the pattern of apparent metathesis that is observed between the ל and the מ of the words שְׁמֶלֶה and שְׁלֵמָה, both of which relate to a “garment.”²⁸ As corroboration for this type of metathesis, Rabbi Samuel ben R. Nissim Masnuth cites 1 Sam 14:47, implying that the

Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 255; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 484.

26. Rabbi Samuel ben R. Nissim Masnuth, *Majan-Gannim: Commentar zu Job* [Hebrew], ed. Salomon Buber (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1889), 110. The word ירשיע in 1 Sam 14:27 is commonly understood to be a theological correction of יושיע (see Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], 118–20; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 2nd ed., WBC 10 [Nashville; Nelson, 2000], 133), or יִשָּׁע “he was victorious” (lit. “he was saved”), which is the retroversion of the Old Greek rendering ἐσώζετο (see S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel with an Introduction on Hebrew Palaeography and the Ancient Versions and Facsimiles of Inscriptions and Maps*, 2nd ed. [1912, repr., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha, 1984], 120; P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, AB 8 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday], 254). See also the comment for this verse in BHS.

27. For 34:29, see Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 523–24.

28. BDB, 969, 971.

inflected form יְרַשִׁיעַ—normally understood as “to condemn as guilty”—is not coherent in context and suggesting that יַרְעִישׁ “to cause to shake” makes better sense.

2. Plausible Meaning of רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17

In light of this background, how can the term רָשָׁעִים be best understood in the context of Job 3:17? It is reasonable to conclude that the word רָשָׁעִים as it is used in Job 3:17 does not signify the wicked but rather points to those who are physically agitated (e.g., moving to and fro) and thus, uneasy, anxious, and restless. Therefore, this verse is best translated:

שָׁם רָשָׁעִים חָדְלוּ רָגַז (17a)

וְשָׁם יָנוּחוּ יָגִיעֵי כֹחַ (17b)

17a. There the restless cease trembling,

17b. And there the weary of strength rest.

Here the meaning of רָשָׁעִים distinctly fits the context of Job 3, in which Job expresses his desire to be in the realm of the dead, where those who suffer from restlessness finally cease from experiencing turmoil. This realm of the dead would hence serve as a consolation to Job, who cannot escape the vicissitudes of his present life. Job's desire is to be at peace, which, according to Job, is only found in the netherworld.

3. The Semantic Progression: A Working Hypothesis

Even though it is plausible that רָשָׁע bears a meaning related to agitation and thereby restlessness the question still remains: How did this root come to bear the dual significances related to agitation and wickedness? A definitive explanation is difficult to produce at this juncture. However, as a starting point it is important to keep in mind a principle that Professor Greenstein has demonstrated in his work: “many Semitic verbs indicate both an initial activity and an activity that results from the first one.”²⁹ This, I think, basically explains the semantic progression of the verb רָשָׁע.

29. Edward L. Greenstein, “On the Use of Akkadian in Biblical Hebrew Philology,” in *Looking at the Ancient Near East and the Bible through the Same Eyes: A Tribute*

There are two potential avenues whereby רָשָׁע could have developed semantically. First, it is possible that רָשָׁע could have originally related to wickedness and eventually came to describe the wicked as people who are physically agitated because they become nervous as a result of guilt and fear of punishment. Second, it is possible that רָשָׁע could have initially indicated some sort of physical agitation and eventually came to take on a meaning related to wickedness, indicating that the wicked are constantly in a state of turmoil, in fear that their godlessness will be found out.³⁰ Space prohibits a thorough investigation of both of these potential routes of semantic developments. Nevertheless, the second option is of particular interest because of the tendency of certain Semitic words depicting movement to eventually acquire a pejorative meaning. Two brief examples should suffice.

3.1. “Vacillating” Judah—Hosea 12:1³¹

In Hos 12:1, a brief mention of the misdeeds of Ephraim and the House of Israel is set in juxtaposition with the assessment concerning the neighboring kingdom of Judah. However, both the nature of the action in which Judah engages as portrayed in v. 1b, and how this pertains to the northerners, are debated.

BHS: סָבְבֵנִי בִכְחַשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וּבִמְרִמָּה בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה עַד רֶד עִם-אֵל וְעַם-קְדוֹשִׁים נֶאֱמָן:

NRSV: Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One.

NIV: Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, the house of Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.

to Aaron Skaist, ed. Kathleen Abraham and Joseph Fleishman (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2012), 351.

30. In Job, the wicked are depicted as being in a perpetual state of distress and fear, as they await the imminent consequences of their impiety (see, e.g., 15:20–21, 24; 18:11–12).

31. Hosea 11:12 in English translations. The following section offers the conclusions of a paper I presented at the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Israel, in August 2017. Professor Greenstein was not only present for the delivery of this paper but also read the manuscript beforehand and provided helpful feedback.

Demonstrating any type of coherence in Hos 12:1b lies in uncovering the significance of the ambiguous word רָד. Some English translations render verse 1b in a way that is favorable toward Judah (NRSV),³² while other translations present the word in an exceedingly negative manner (NIV).³³ On the one hand, it is difficult to reconcile the positive translations with the immediate literary context because verse 3a indicates that the Lord has a charge against Judah (וְרִיב לִיהוּדָה עַם-יְהוּדָה).³⁴ Such a stark contradiction in close proximity makes no sense. The primary reason for the ambiguity in verse 1b is the text's paralleling of the verb רָד, apparently derived from the verbal root רוּד "to wander, roam,"³⁵ with the commendable attribute נֶאֱמָן, "faithful." Because of this correspondence, רָד might plausibly be understood to be equally as laudatory as נֶאֱמָן.³⁶ On the other hand, the exclusively negative understanding of רָד ("unruly") seems to depend too heavily on the Old Greek of verse 1.³⁷

As a potential solution to this difficult reading, I contend that the translators may not have properly understood all of the layers of meaning

32. See also, e.g., RSV, NRSV, NJPS, KJV, ASV.

33. NASB also supplies "unruly."

34. Some have suggested emendation of "Judah" to "Israel" in v. 3a in order to reconcile this line with v. 1b. See, e.g., William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 377. Purportedly, the insertion of Judah in v. 3a occurred as a result of Judean redaction (see, e.g., A. A. MacIntosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997], 479–80). However, there is a lack of textual evidence to support this conjectured emendation and no cogent reason to suppose the text was miscopied or altered, since the major witnesses can be explained by the MT (Francis I. Andersen, and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980], 601).

35. BDB, s.v. "רוּד," 923. See also *HALOT*, s.v. "רוּד," 1194, "to roam about freely." Kaddari defines the word as "יצא למרעה" in Menachem Zevi Kaddari, *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006), 992. Alonso Schökel posits "vagar" (roam, wander), or "marcharse" (to leave, depart) in Luis Alonso Schökel, *Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-Español* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1994), 691.

36. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 601.

37. The Old Greek renders v. 1aβ–1ba Χαὶ ἐν ἀσεβείαις οἶχος Ἰσραὴλ καὶ Ἰουδα, depicting Judah as blameworthy here and in v. 3a. The Old Greek goes on to state in v. 1ba νῦν ἔγνω αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός. With the placement of the verb ἔγνω where one would expect רָד, it is presumed that the translator read from a *Vorlage* that included the word ידע "to know."

of the word רָד (from the Hebrew root רוד). This is especially true if the meaning of the word is a result of semantic development customary to ancient Near Eastern languages that were not known/used by the translators. Turning to the Arabic language for correlation, one notes that the Hebrew רָד is closely related to the Arabic verb *rad* (رَد), which comes from the root *rwd* (رود). The verb *rad* (رَد) might be understood a type of alternating movement between different locations.³⁸ Applied in a metaphorical manner, this lexeme would depict the subject as going back and forth between various locations, striving to encounter a specific place to settle.³⁹ The Akkadian dictionaries also define the comparable word *râdu* as depicting some sort of side to side motion. CAD defines *râdu* as “to tremble,”⁴⁰ while AHW notes that *râdu* is related to bodily movement, defining it as “beben” (to quiver, shake).⁴¹ These definitions are consistent with the idea that the related Akkadian verb *râdu* depicts some sort of back-and-forth movement. Taking the comparable Arabic and Akkadian words into consideration, the Hebrew רוד could also indicate moving to and fro or some type of vacillation. The meaning of רָד is apparently used by the writer of Hosea in a secondary or metaphorical sense to depict Judah as vacillating back and forth among allegiances, between the God of Israel and the קְדוּשִׁים (i.e., other Canaanite deities).⁴² Thus a reasonable translation of Hos 12:1b that depicts this unfavorable action is: “Judah still vacillates between allegiance with God and being faithful to the Canaanite deities.”

Glossing רוד as “to vacillate” in this context unveils the fickleness of Judah by finding a meaning for the verb רָד that is analogous to the

38. As suggested by H. S. Nyberg, who argues that a proper understanding of the “Bedouin” (his term) background is requisite for grasping the full significance of the root רוד. H. S. Nyberg (*Studien zum Hoseabuche: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Klärung des Problems der alttestamentlichen Textkritik* [Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1935], 92) states that “רָד gehört zu רוד, das der Grundbedeutung nach ein echtes Beduinenverbum ist, vgl. ar. رَد ‘Weideplätze wechseln, für sich und sein Volk neue Weideplätze suchen.’”

39. Lane (s.v. “رود,” 1183) provides various examples that corroborate the suggestion that رود indicates vacillating movement for both humans and animals.

40. CAD 14:61.

41. AHW 2:941.

42. For a discussion regarding the קְדוּשִׁים being identified as Canaanite deities, see Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 603. See Job 5:1 and 15:15 for קְדוּשָׁה used in pejorative manner in reference to the holy one(s) as opposed to the true God.

functions of other verbs that indicate back-and-forth movement at the fundamental stage and that develop a secondary meaning of vacillating between allegiances. The word רשע seemingly corresponds to the pattern of Semitic words that indicate movement, eventually acquiring a negative connotation.

3.2. *Nabalkutu* and בגד

Akkadian *nabalkutu* serves as another example to corroborate the suggestion that certain Semitic verbs of movement can metaphorically convey rebellion through a lack of faithfulness. Similarly to רוד and רשע, the verb *nabalkutu* literally relates to physical movement. CAD defines this verb as “to cross over a wall, a mountain, an obstacle, (and/or) a frontier,”⁴³ while AHW defines this word as “überschreiten” (to cross).⁴⁴ The dictionaries note that this word can be used metaphorically in the sense of “to change sides” or “to change allegiance,”⁴⁵ to “resist an order; oppose” and to “be in breach of contract.”⁴⁶ AHW notes that this could be in the sense of “Gelände durchqueren” (crossing over terrain) as well as “sich empören gegen” (to rebel or to be in arms against), and “abfallen von” (to defect from, rebel against).⁴⁷

Professor Greenstein has cogently argued that the Akkadian word *nabalkutu* and the Biblical Hebrew root בגד are not only semantically but also etymologically related. Greenstein points out that multiple contexts in which the root בגד appears in the Bible do not lend themselves to the commonly assumed meaning of the word related to “treachery.”⁴⁸ Derivations of the meaning of the word from the root בגד “clothing” and from the supposedly related Arabic words *bajada* and *bijād* also prove to be implausible, according to Greenstein. Thus Greenstein turns to the Akkadian language and notes that *nabalkutu*, from the root *bkt*, corresponds with the Hebrew consonants *bgd*.⁴⁹ Not only is *nabalkutu* etymologically

43. CAD 11.1:11.

44. AHW 2:695.

45. CAD 11.1:17.

46. See discussion in Greenstein, “Use of Akkadian,” 341–49.

47. AHW 2:695.

48. See, e.g., BDB, s.v. “בָּגַד” 93.

49. The derivation of root *bkt* is based upon understanding *nabalkutu* to be constructed on the pattern of the *niphal* (though it maintains an active meaning) and thus

related to בגד, but they also functionally correspond in the sense that both of these words tend to be used intransitively. Therefore there are a number of biblical texts in which *nabalkutu* serves as the semantic equivalent of בגד to indicate “breaking faith/an agreement”—particularly as it relates to a marital agreement or a treaty.⁵⁰ Thus, based upon phonological, syntactical, and semantic correspondences between *nabalkutu* and בגד, Greenstein concludes that the underlying sense of בגד does not primarily relate to treachery but rather “turning against or away from.” According to Greenstein, all other usages of this word have developed from this primary sense.⁵¹

The slight change in the conventional understanding of בגד—from relating to treachery to a meaning indicating unfaithfulness by “turning away from/turning against”—is consequential because it is a result of a philological reanalysis and reinterpretation of a well-attested and supposedly understood Hebrew word. A fresh look at בגד in light of the related Akkadian word *nabalkutu* clarifies certain usages in the Bible in which the contexts hinder the traditional understanding of the word.⁵² Additionally, the derivation of the Hebrew בגד from the Akkadian *nabalkutu* corroborates the suggestion that certain Semitic verbs depicting physical movement can take on additional, pejorative meanings, in this case to suggest unfaithfulness. Accordingly, רָשָׁע may have also progressed in meaning from indicating physical motion to a significance related to wickedness.

4. Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have encouraged readers to reconsider the conventional understanding of the term רָשָׁעִים in Job 3:17. The old adage “context is key” properly depicts the need to reread, reanalyze, and reinterpret רָשָׁע. The immediate context of Job 3:17 and an examination of Job 34:29 nullify any confidence in understanding the רָשָׁעִים in 3:17 to bear the conventional meaning of רָשָׁע, “to be wicked, to act wickedly.”

bearing an *n* as well as a liquid consonant (*l*) that are not part of the root. The correspondence to the Hebrew *bgd* is deduced upon permitting the conversion of voiceless consonants to voiced consonants (Greenstein, “Use of Akkadian,” 346).

50. See examples in Greenstein, “Use of Akkadian,” 346–48.

51. Greenstein, “Use of Akkadian,” 349.

52. See especially the examples provided by Greenstein in “Use of Akkadian,” 346–47.

In light of this contextual evidence, it is appropriate to conclude that in Job 3:17 the term רָשָׁעִים refers to those who are physically agitated and thus restless. Understood in this manner, the root רָשַׁע may belong to a group of Semitic verbs that indicate movement and also bear a negative connotation. Unlike the study of רָשַׁע, the two examples presented above have cognate roots by which is it easier to track the semantic progression of related Hebrew terms. However, as Professor Greenstein asserts, “etymology cannot by itself determine the meaning of a term in any particular context.”⁵³ The usages of רָשַׁע in Job 3:17 and 34:29 indicate the need to reassess the traditional understanding of the word.

Reading the poetic sections of Job is a perpetual exercise in retrospective patterning. It is a discipline of reading and rereading. It is a practice of readers coming to their own conclusions after expectations—even conventional/traditional translations—have been foiled. Indeed, it is a careful practice in humility. Perhaps our only expectations as we read the poetry of Job should be to expect the unexpected and to learn to become better readers as we reread, retranslate, and reinterpret the text.

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53. Greenstein, “Use of Akkadian,” 341.

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God's Ambiguous Oaths in Amos 4:2 and Psalm 89:36 (and Psalm 60:8//108:8?)

Shalom E. Holtz

Our honoree has taught us the value of deconstruction as a literary approach to biblical texts for some thirty years now, since a time when “little ha[d] been published as yet on the applications of deconstruction to the Hebrew Bible,” and he had “seen virtually no purely deconstructive readings of it.”¹ Already then he highlighted the prominent role that ambiguity plays in this kind of reading:

Deconstruction holds that ambiguity is not an occasional property of literature, selectively enriching the sense of the text. Ambiguity is characteristic of language itself, the dynamic play in the scene of reading. While other critical approaches attempt to solve the puzzle, deconstruction denies the objectivity of order and “renounces the ambition to master or demystify its subject.”²

From this perspective, because all language is ambiguous, all texts present us with puzzles to which there are no finite solutions. Deconstruction, in fact, sees ambiguities not as problems to be resolved but as the very stuff that enlivens the act of reading.

At the root of this lies another core theoretical notion that Edward L. Greenstein, as a literary critic, has taught the fields of biblical and ancient

1. Edward L. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” *Prooftexts* 9 (1989): 44. For other examples, see Greenstein, “Presenting Genesis 1, Constructively and Deconstructively,” *Prooftexts* 21 (2001): 1–22; and Greenstein, “The Multifaceted Exegesis of Nehama Leibowitz and Postmodern Exegesis” [Hebrew], *Limmudim: Beit Midrash Katuv* 1 (2001): 21–33.

2. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 57.

Near Eastern studies: meaning inheres not in the text but in the reader. We quote just one example from his own numerous statements on this subject:

We can never remind ourselves too often that the meanings of the texts we read result from the kind of training we have, from the theories and methods we tend to employ, and from the models and parallels we adduce in order to gain the leverage of understanding. Language does not mean by itself; we make sense of it.³

Exposing textual ambiguities invites readers to make sense. Meaningful reading begins wherever texts seem most ambiguous or least comprehensible. It is exactly there, where “the leverage of understanding” seems farthest from reach, that meaning emerges from readers’ interactions with the texts.

What is true of all texts is certainly true of the texts we will consider here. The biblical verses we will examine contain an overt ambiguity, recognizable even to those less comfortable or familiar with the methods of deconstruction. It is the kind of ambiguity that has always prompted different interpretations.⁴ This ambiguity makes our verses “difficult,” a topic to which Greenstein has devoted at least one study, in which he applies George Steiner’s categorizations of difficulty to the book of Job’s poetry.⁵

3. Edward L. Greenstein, “Some Developments in the Study of Language and Some Implications for Interpreting Ancient Texts and Cultures,” *IOS* 20 (2002): 465 (with preceding discussion on 443 and 463–464). Also see Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 51–52, 55–56; Greenstein, “Presenting Genesis 1,” 1–2; Greenstein, “Multifaceted Exegesis,” 22–23; Greenstein, “Hermeneutics in the Biblical World: From Dream Interpretation to Textual Exegesis” [Hebrew], *Moed: Annual for Jewish Studies* 13 (2003): 65; and Greenstein, “Reading Pragmatically: Interpreting the Binding of Isaac,” in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank Polak, HBM 40, Amsterdam Studies in the Bible and Religion 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 102–23 (especially 108–12, 116, and 122–23).

4. Compare Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 56. Similarly, see Richard C. Steiner, “Saadia vs. Rashi: On the Shift from Meaning-Maximalism to Meaning-Minimalism in Medieval Biblical Lexicology,” *JQR* 88 (1988): 213–58; and Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10: On the Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguities of וְיָצָא as Reflected in the Prophecies of Nathan, Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 33–60.

5. Edward L. Greenstein, “‘Difficulty’ in the Poetry of Job,” in *A Critical Engagement: Essays in the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David J. A. Clines

Specifically, in terms of Greenstein's own description of these categories, these verses exhibit a "contingent difficulty," or one that is "conventionally linguistic or philological."⁶ While we cannot propose one ultimate understanding of the texts, the conventions of philology allow us to at least expose the ambiguity and justify multiple interpretations.

Two verses in the Hebrew Bible present God taking an oath, as follows:

נשבע אדני יהוה בקדשו כי הנה ימים באים עליכם ונשא אתכם בצנות ואחריתכן
 בסירות דוגה (Amos 4:2)
 אחת נשבעתי בקדשי אם לדוד אכזב (Ps 89:36)

The verse from the book of Amos refers to God's action in the third-person, while the verse from Ps 89 quotes God's own description of an oath to David. In both, the verb for swearing (שבע, N stem), predicated of God, occurs in combination with the noun קדש, which is preceded by the preposition ב- and followed by the relevant possessive suffix (-ו for third-person speech in Amos 4:2; -י for the direct quotation of God's first-person speech in Ps 89:36). The ambiguities, as I see them, are two. The first is lexical, pertaining to the definition of the word קדש, which might refer to God's own holiness or to God's sacred domain. The second ambiguity, which depends in part on the first, pertains to the function of the preposition ב-. It might denote the object by which God swears. Alternatively, because the noun קדש might refer to a location, the preposition might refer to where God takes the oath.

Ibn Ezra's two suggestions for interpreting Ps 89:36 reflect the first ambiguity:⁷

and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 186–195 (references to Steiner and others at 188 n. 12 and 193–95).

6. Greenstein, "Difficulty," 188. For George Steiner's own description and examples of this category, see "On Difficulty," in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 19–27. Although George Steiner describes this kind of difficulty as ultimately resolvable, ambiguity (or, perhaps better, polysemy) remains in poetry, where "multiplicity of meaning, 'enclosedness,' are the rule rather than the exception" (21).

7. Cited from www.mgketer.org. All translations of texts are my own, made in consultation with published ones. On Amos 4:2, Ibn Ezra offers only the interpretation based on Deut 32:40. This omission may be deliberate, since in his subsequent comments on Ps 89:36 he suggests, based on the verse's opening word, אחת ("once"), that *only* once (when God swore to David, as the psalm describes) did God swear by

בקדשי- השמים, שהם עומדים, בדרך 'כי אשא אל שמים ידי'. או בקדשי- שם כמו קדושתו.

בקדשי: [This refers to] the heavens,⁸ which are eternal, in the manner of "I raise my hand to heaven" (Deut 32:40).⁹ Or בקדשי is a noun like קדושתו ("my holiness").

According to Ibn Ezra's first suggestion, God swears by the heavens. The parallel to Deut 32:40 confirms that God indeed swears in this manner because, along with God's oath gesture, the hand raised to heaven, that verse also quotes God's own oath formula, "and I say, as I live forever (חַי לְעֹלָם לְעֹלָם)".¹⁰ Gesture and word both assure that God's oath is eternally valid.¹¹

Ibn Ezra's second suggestion has God swear by God's own characteristic holiness. To describe this, Ibn Ezra resorts to the Post-Biblical Hebrew word קדושה, which denotes the abstract "holiness." In Biblical Hebrew, the noun קדש bears this abstract meaning. God is described as קדוש (e.g., Ps 99:3,9), and God's holiness is קדשו.¹²

Many, perhaps even most, modern interpreters have accepted versions of this second suggestion by Ibn Ezra.¹³ According to this line of

God's own holiness. Accordingly, the meaning "by my holiness" cannot apply to the oath in the book of Amos, which is obviously different from God's oath to David.

8. On the interpretation of the noun קדש to mean "heavens," compare Ibn Ezra to Ps 150:1. While this specific interpretation is problematic, Ibn Ezra's approach remains valuable. See discussion below.

9. On the heavens' role as signifiers of the oath's eternal validity, compare Ibn Ezra's comment on Deut 32:40.

10. See David Rolph Seely, "The Raised Hand of God as an Oath Gesture," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 411–21; and Blane Conklin, *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 15–17.

11. Compare Dan 12:7.

12. Compare the description of God as גָּדוֹל (e.g., Ps 48:2; 96:4; 145:3) and God's greatness as גְּדֻלּוֹ (e.g., Deut 5:21; 11:2; Ps 150:2, גְּדֻלּוֹ).

13. See NJPS and NRSV to both verses. See also Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1907), 2:252, 262; Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on The Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:41; Victor Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 1951), 95, 99; Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: SPCK, 1960), 166; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, 3 vols., AB 16–17A

thought, God's oaths in these verses are, at least formally, like God's oaths everywhere else. They are analogous to oaths pronounced by humans who swear "by God." Elsewhere God modifies the human oath formulas by swearing using substitutes for God's own name, in most cases, "by myself" (בי) or "by my life" (חי אני).¹⁴ In our two verses, the accommodation for the divine speaker of the oath comes in the form of one of God's attributes.

Meir Weiss suggests that the word קדש in Amos 4:2 represents not just any attribute of God but a special one, akin to God's very essence.¹⁵ A possible, although not quite exact, parallel may come from Akkadian

(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 2:310 (using "on" rather than "by"); Moses Buttenwieser, *The Psalms Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (New York: Ktav, 1969), 242; James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1969), 72; Donald L. Magnetti, S.J., "The Oath in the Old Testament in the Light of Related Terms and in the Legal and Covenantal Context of the Ancient Near East" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1969), 182–84; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Covenant Lawsuit of the Prophet Amos: III 1–IV 13," *VT* 21 (1971): 347; Jean-Bernard Dumortier, "Un rituel d'intronisation, le Ps LXXXIX, 2–38," *VT* 22 (1972): 191; Hugh C. White, "The Divine Oath in Genesis," *JBL* 92 (1973): 172; Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 204; Moshe Greenberg, "Oath. In the Bible," *EncJud* 12:1296; Richard J. Clifford, "Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler's Continued Failure," *HTR* 73 (1980): 46; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 408; Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 128–30; Meir Weiss, *The Book of Amos* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 1:102–3; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 209; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, HAT 1/15 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 353; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 2:400, 411; Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4:1–3 and Its Imagery," *VT* 59 (2009): 471. Conklin translates the relevant part of Ps 89:36, "One thing I hereby swear by my holiness" (*Oath Formulas*, 21). This is contradicted, however, by his position just a page earlier (*Oath Formulas*, 20), where he counts two times in which God swears "by his/my holy place." There is no verse citation to support this position, although Conklin's use of "his/my" indicates that he is referring to our verses.

14. See Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, 19–30. On the particular issue of the syntax of the second formulation, see Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, 25–26, together with Moshe Greenberg, "The Hebrew Oath Particle *hay/hē*," *JBL* 76 (1957): 34–39; and Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "שבועה," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [Hebrew] 7:483–85.

15. *The Book of Amos* 1:102–3. For similar views, see Mays, *Amos*, 72; M. Daniel Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective*, JSOT-Sup 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 202–3; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:411; and Nwaoru, "Fresh Look," 471.

oaths taken “by the *adê* of the (human) king.” Some have interpreted the word *adê* in these oaths as referring to “a special supernatural manifestation of royal power.”¹⁶ God’s קדש and the human king’s *adê* both represent attributes that are tantamount to the beings themselves (divine in Hebrew, human in Akkadian) by which the oaths are sworn.

Other exegetes who adopt the interpretation that God swears “by his/my holiness” assign contextual significance to this specific substitution. It is taken, quite logically, to signify that which makes God entirely different from humans. These divine oaths are, therefore, irrevocable, because “holiness is the absolutely supreme divinity of God himself, which stands opposed to all human unfaithfulness and frailty.”¹⁷ In Amos 4:2, the oath by God’s holiness conveys not just the irrevocability of the impending punishment but also God’s utter opposition to the condemnable behavior of the “cows of Bashan” (4:1).¹⁸

Viewed within the limited context of these two verses, this interpretation proves acceptable. We might, however, consider other examples of divine oaths, an approach that leads us away from this first possibility. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, when God is the subject of the locution ב- + נשבע, the object of the preposition is not a characteristic of God, as has been suggested for בקדשו. Rather, God swears by God’s “own self” (ב + pronoun),¹⁹ God’s “soul” (בנפשו, Jer 51:14; Amos 6:8), God’s own name (Jer 44:26), and “the pride of Jacob” (Amos 8:7). The object of the preposition ב- might also indicate the means by which God performs the oath, as in “with his right (hand) and his mighty arm” (Isa 62:1) or the manner in which God swears: “in my anger” (באפי, Ps 95:11) and “in your faithfulness” (באמונתך, Ps 89:50).²⁰ This broader context exposes the limitations

16. CAD, s.v. “adû B” (1.1:135). See Małgorzata Sandowicz, *Oaths and Curse: A Study in Neo- and Late Babylonian Legal Formulary* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 66–67.

17. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 206 (referring to Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36).

18. Driver, as cited by Cripps, *Commentary on the Book of Amos*, 166; Weiss, *The Book of Amos* 1:103; Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, 202. Mays, on the other hand, understands the holiness here as “the dynamic, awesome, threatening power of the divine” (*Amos*, 72).

19. Gen 12:16; Exod 32:13; Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13.

20. Compare 2 Chr 15:15. Some, however, do interpret the objects of the prepositions in Pss 89:50 and 95:11 as indicators of an attribute by which God swears (similar to בקדשו) rather than the manner in which God does so. See Clifford, “Psalm 89,” 42; Dennis Pardee, “The Semantic Parallelism of Psalm 89,” in *In the Shelter of*

of the interpretation of our two verses as descriptions of God swearing by God's own "holiness." God's swearing by God's own holiness, while not entirely out of the question, requires an interpretation generally out of line with most other usages.

Additionally, this approach requires an uncharacteristic interpretation of the word קדש itself. Most often, forms of this word with possessive suffixes referring to God occur as adjectives in construction with other nouns, as in, for example, the familiar phrases שם קדשי ("my holy name"), היכל קדשך ("your holy palace"), or הר קדשו ("his holy mountain"). Outside such adjectival constructions, however, forms of the word קדש with possessive suffixes referring to God are rather rare. Apart from Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36, they occur only three other times:

(Ps 60:8//108:8) אלהים דבר בקדשו אעלה אחלקה שכם ועמק סכות אמדו.
 (Ps 114:2) היתה יהודה לקדשו ישראל ממשלותיו.
 (Ps 150:1) הללו יה הללו אל בקדשו הללוהו ברקיע עזו.

As in Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36, in all of these examples the possessive form of the word קדש is also attached to a prefix, ב- (Pss 60:8//108:8; 150:1) or ל- (Ps 114:2). In at least the last two examples (we shall discuss Ps 60:8//108:8 shortly) the word in question refers not to "holiness" but to the specific location of God's holy abode (either in heaven or on earth). This is consistent with the more widely attested definite forms בקדש and הקדש (again, outside of adjectival constructions), both of which denote a specific sacred site. Might this meaning apply to Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36, too?

Ibn Ezra, in the first of his two suggestions quoted above, puts forward just this kind of interpretation. To recall, he suggests that God swears not by a divine attribute but by a location, the heavens. While this particular interpretation of the word קדשו may be open to question, the general direction is worth pursuing, especially in light of the usage considerations

Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOTSup 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 128; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 349; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:401 (translating "by your faithfulness," with no further comment); Bernard Gosse, "Le parallélisme synonymique ḥsd 'mwnh, le Ps 89 et les réponses du quatrième livre du Psautier, Ps 90–106," ZAW 122 (2010): 186, 197; W. H. Bellinger Jr. "The Psalms, Covenant, and the Persian Period," in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*, ed. Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 317; and Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, 20–21.

we have just presented above. In line with understandings of the meaning of קדשו as an indicator of a sacred location, rather than the heavens, we might suggest that, in Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36, God swears by God's own sanctuary or the divine abode.

To support this interpretation, we should like to find parallel oaths, uttered by God or by humans, that invoke a sacred location. In the Hebrew Bible, one possible example may occur in Exod 17:16: *כי יד על בס יה מלחמה*: ליהוה בעמלק מדר דר. As far back as a tradition ascribed to Rabbi Eliezer in the Mekilta, this verse records an oath sworn by the throne of God.²¹ Another possible parallel might come from the book of Amos itself, in which the prophet predicts doom for those who “swear ... saying ... ‘by the life of the road to Beersheba [חי דרך באר-שבע]” (8:14). For our purposes, neither verse is unequivocal.²² Extrabiblical evidence, however, shows that people did, in fact, swear by sacred locations. The New Testament and the rabbinic Jewish corpus mention oaths by the temple and by Jerusalem.²³ For example, the phrase *המעון הזה* (“[by] this [divine] abode”) introduces several oaths quoted in the Mishnah (m. Ket. 2:10; m. Ker. 1:7; 6:5). From a time closer to the biblical period, one Aramaic legal text from Elephantine records an oath sworn (or to be sworn) “by H[erem] the [god], by the place of prostration (במסגדא) and by Anathyahu.”²⁴ This evidence

21. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 2:270. Modern interpreters who follow include Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 96 (who also notes the ambiguity regarding the speaker of this particular oath); and William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 620.

22. On Exod 17:16, see Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, 3 vols., HCOT (Kampen: Kok, 1996), 2:388–91. On Amos 8:14, see Saul M. Olyan, “The Oaths of Amos 8:14,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, JSOTSup 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 121–35.

23. Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine; Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994), 132–41.

24. Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, 4 vols. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 2:146–47 (B7.3:1–4). The placement of the conjunction ʾ- only before the last of the three elements (Anathyahu) indicates that all three, including the “place of prostration,” are elements by which the oath is sworn. Interpreting the middle element to mean “in the place of prostration” rather than “by” it makes for a rougher reading. For discussion, see Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 155–56. For the possibility that the letters אה[רם] אלה[א]

might be admittedly somewhat later than our biblical texts. Still, it is quite reasonable to suggest that, if the biblical materials are, in fact, earlier, then they represent an antecedent of oaths sworn by sacred locations.²⁵

Invocation of God's sacred domain makes contextual sense in Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36. In his commentary to Amos, Klaus Koch wonders about the possibility that the קדש, God's true sacred space, stands in deliberate contrast to הר שמרון, mentioned just one verse prior as the place of the "cows of Bashan."²⁶ In Ps 89, we note the mention of the "witness in the sky" (עד בשחק) in verse 38, which might refer to God's heavenly abode, by which God has sworn.²⁷

The possibility of interpreting the noun קדשו as a location rather than as an attribute of God exposes an additional ambiguity in our verses, which pertains to the role of the preposition ב-. If קדשו refers to God's sacred place, then it is possible that the preposition indicates where God is located rather than the object or location by which God swears. In other words, we might translate Ps 89:36, "I have sworn *in* my sanctuary,"²⁸ rather than, "I have sworn *by* my sanctuary," and Amos 4:2, "My Lord God has sworn *in* his sanctuary," rather than, "My Lord God has sworn *by* his sanctuary."

Usage of the combination שבע (N stem or C stem) + ב- allows for this possibility. The verb on its own indicates the action of swearing and does not require the preposition and its object to convey this meaning. There are some biblical examples parallel to the proposed interpretation.²⁹ A particularly apt one would come from 2 Kgs 11:4, in which Jehoiada the priest assembles the members of the military to the temple and makes them take an oath (C stem of שבע) in the temple (וישבע אתם) בבית ה' to protect the young king, Jehoash. God, in Amos 4:2 and Ps

refer to "the god's sacred property" rather than "by Ḥerem the god," see Karel van der Toorn, "Ḥerem-Bethel and Elephantine Oath Procedure," *ZAW* 98 (1986): 282–85.

25. See Shmuel Ahituv, "האשרה במקרא ובמקורות אפיקוריים עבריים," *Beth Mikra* 40 (1995): 335.

26. Klaus Koch, *Amos: Untersucht mit den Methoden einer strukturalen Formgeschichte*, 3 vols., AOAT 30 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 2:23.

27. For discussion, see Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 424–27; and Paul G. Mosca, "Once Again the Heavenly Witness of Ps 89:38," *JBL* 105 (1986): 27–37.

28. Pardee, "Semantic Parallelism of Psalm 89," 127. Pardee's choice of "in" here does not come with any comment. It is, however, apparently deliberate, since elsewhere, including in Ps 89:50, the preposition ב- is translated "by" rather than "in."

29. Judg 21:1 (במצפה; contrast with 21:7, בבה); 2 Kgs 11:4 (בבית ה'); Isa 65:16 (בסתר); Jer 38:16 (בסתר).

89:36, occupies a position comparable to the members of the military in 2 Kgs 11:4. Accordingly, the verses describe oaths and where they occur but say nothing about the objects by which the oaths are sworn.

Would there be any significance to a notice of the location in which, rather than by which, God swears? Koch, whose contextual observations on Amos 4:2 we noted above, cites Mic 1:2.³⁰ There God comes “from his sacred palace” (מהיכל קדשו) as an accusing witness. Based on this, Amos 4:2 describes God’s pronouncement of judgment against Israel in the divine court.³¹ In a similar, if more benign, manner, in Ps 89:36 the divine court is the scene of God’s oath to David.

Another specific mention of the location of God’s speech occurs, quite possibly, in Ps 60:8//108:8, quoted earlier. There, rather than swearing, God is said to have “spoken” (בקדשו (דבר). Numerous interpreters of this verse take it as an indication that “God has spoken in his sanctuary.”³² The words that follow can be interpreted as an oracle pronounced in the earthly sanctuary³³ or as a pronouncement occurring in God’s heavenly abode, as suggested by Rogerson and McKay: “The picture is of the warrior returning home, calling for his wash-bowl, flinging his shoes into a corner and shouting at his slave.”³⁴

If we adopt an interpretation of Ps 60:8//108:8 along these lines, then it offers a parallel to the locative interpretation of בקדשו in Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36. Doing so, however, requires us to acknowledge that many of the same ambiguities we have already observed occur in Ps 60:8//108:8, too. Raymond J. Tournay’s comments on the phrase in Ps 60:8//108:8 encapsulate the quandary quite nicely:

Le terme *qodeš* recèle une nouvelle ambiguïté. Dans le Ps 89, 36, Dieu jure par sa sainteté. Mais dans Ps 114, 2 et 150, 7, comme dans Am 4, 2, il

30. Koch, *Amos*, 2:23.

31. Compare Isa 6:1–13; Ps 11:4–7.

32. J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 51–100*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 54–57; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 236; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 1, 4; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., WBC 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 92; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:93; Claudia Süssenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie von Ps 42–83*, FAT 2/7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 155.

33. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 4; Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 51–100*, 56.

34. Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 51–100*, 58. Compare Dahood, *Psalms*, 2:75; and Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms*, 2:100.

s'agit du sanctuaire de Jérusalem, souvent nommé dans la psalmique....
L'oracle cultuel qui va suivre est censé prononcé par Dieu lui-même dans
son Temple, à Sion.³⁵

In practice, as signaled by his reasoning above, Tournay adopts the locative translation of *בְּקִדְשׁוֹ* in Ps 60:8//108:8 ("Dans son sanctuaire").³⁶ Nevertheless, he remains fully aware of the other possibilities, given Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36.³⁷ Despite the absence of a clear verb for swearing, Ps 60:8//108:8 may, in fact, contain a promise made "by God's holiness"³⁸ or even, quite possibly, "by God's sanctuary." If so, then its value for the interpretation of Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36 remains, albeit in a different manner. It no longer serves as a parallel for assigning significance to where God swears. Instead, it becomes a parallel in support of an interpretation of the object by which God swears.

We can summarize the ambiguities we have exposed here by offering three different translations of Amos 4:2: "My Lord God has sworn by his holiness"; "My Lord God has sworn by his sanctuary"; "My Lord God has sworn in his sanctuary." Likewise for Ps 89:36: "I have sworn by my holiness"; "I have sworn by my sanctuary"; "I have sworn in my sanctuary." At the level of the individual verses, and even of the particular verses in context, the consequences of these different translations are, in the end, not that far-reaching. Assuming, however, that God's oaths have some analogue in the human sphere, then these verses might impact an account of biblical oath procedures. Depending on one's rendering of these verses, one might, for example, see in them evidence for swearing by the temple or even in the temple. Similarly, from the point of view of theology, the possibility that God swears by God's own "holiness" might illuminate ancient concepts of divinity and the sacred.

Still, as we bring the oaths in Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36 into broader conversations, we must remain aware of the ambiguities they present.

35. Raymond J. Tournay, "Psaumes 57, 60, et 108: Analyse et Interpretation," *RB* 96 (1989):18. Note that Tournay apparently distinguishes between the meaning of Amos 4:2 and Ps 89:36.

36. Tournay, "Psaumes," 12.

37. Others who call attention to both possible interpretations of Ps 60:8//108:8 include the note in the NJPS translation; Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 51–100*, 57; and Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 92.

38. See Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 2:172; Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, 68; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 100, 102.

Greenstein's reminder, quoted near the beginning of this essay, is all the more necessary here. For any effort to make sense of God's oaths in these verses, the tools of philology provide not just one but many "models and parallels we [can] adduce in order to gain the leverage of understanding." Any understanding becomes a matter of choice, which can be as bewildering as it is empowering. By attuning ourselves to the ambiguities, we attune ourselves to the possibilities open to us as readers. Thus we may conclude by taking our verses as illustrations of one final observation by Greenstein:

If in reading we have the power to make choices and to determine the outcome of our reading, then we can become more experienced and versatile readers so as to enhance the things we can do when we read, so that when there is something we might like to do, we will be in a better position to do it.³⁹

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39. Greenstein, "Reading Pragmatically," 123. I am grateful to Yael Landman, Małgorzata Sandowicz, Baruch Schwartz, Mark Smith, Eran Viesel, and Bruce Wells for their willing responses to my inquiries at various stages of my research. Special thanks to Shamir Yona and the staff of the Department of Bible, Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies for arranging a summer visit to Ben Gurion University of the Negev, during which I made use of the excellent resources available at the Zalman Aranne Central Library.

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Psalm 29: Canaanite or Israelite? The Evidence of the Numerical Structure

Israel Knohl

0. A Psalm of David.¹

1. Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

2. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy array.

3. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, upon many waters.

4. The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

5. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars,
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

6. He makes Lebanon to skip² like a calf
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

7. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

8. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

9. The voice of the LORD makes the oaks to whirl

1. I do not include the title “A Psalm of David” (מזמור לדוד) in my count, since I accept the standard scholarly view that the titles of the psalms were later additions. For a discussion of the different titles and the time of their composition, see Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993), 21–32. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical translations are from the RSV.

2. I accept Harold L. Ginsberg’s proposal in *The Writings of Ugarit* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1936), 130, wherein he suggests that the ׀ at the end of וִירְקִידִם is enclitic and its function is emphatic, rather than an indication of plurality. For this reason, I offer a division of the cola that goes against the syntax suggested by the cantillation marks.

and strips the forests bare,
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
10. The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.
11. May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

	(1) מְזִמּוֹר לַדָּוִד
הָבּוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד וְעֹז:	הָבּוּ לַיהוָה בְּגִי אֱלִים
הַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ:	(2) הָבּוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד שָׁמֹ
אֱלֹהֵי־הַכְּבוֹד הַרְעִים	(3) קוֹל יְהוָה עַל־הַמָּיִם
יְהוָה עַל־מַיִם רַבִּים:	(4) קוֹל־יְהוָה בַּפֶּחַח
קוֹל יְהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־	(5) קוֹל יְהוָה שֹׁבֵר אֲרָזִים
וַיִּשְׁבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־אֲרָזֵי הַלְבָנוֹן:	(6) וַיִּקְרָאֵם כְּמוֹ־עֵגֶל לְבָנוֹן
וַיִּשְׁרֹץ כְּמוֹ בֹד־אֲמִים:	(7) קוֹל־יְהוָה חֹצֵב לַהֲבוֹת אֵשׁ:
יְחִיל יְהוָה מִדְּבַר קֹדֶשׁ:	(8) קוֹל יְהוָה יְחִיל מִדְּבַר
וַיַּחֲשֹׁף יַעֲרֹת	(9) קוֹל יְהוָה יְחַלֵּל אֵילֹת
וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה מִלֶּדָּה לְעוֹלָם:	(10) יְהוָה לִמְבוֹל יֵשֶׁב
יְהוָה יִבְרַךְ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם:	(11) יְהוָה עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן

A preliminary survey of Ps 29 yields the following division of the verses into two groups: The first group includes verses 3–5, 7–9, in which the expression “the voice of the LORD” appears seven times. The second group includes verses 1–2, 6, 10–11, in which this expression does not appear.

An examination of the number of words and cola in the two groups reveals a surprising finding: the number of words in the first group, in which “the voice of the LORD” appears seven times, is forty-nine, in other words 7×7 . In the second group there are ten cola; the total number of words in this group is forty. This finding alone suggests that Ps 29 is a meticulously thought out composition in which the author instilled a specific numerical structure and perhaps a symbolic structure as well.³

There is also a clear numerical correspondence between the introductory verses (vv. 1–2 without the late title) and the final verses (vv. 11–12). In both the introduction and the conclusion there are four cola, and in both the introduction and the conclusion the Tetragrammaton appears

3. One possibility is that the centrality of the number four in this psalm, which will shortly be discussed, is meant to evoke the name YHWH, which is four letters long.

four times.⁴ The centrality of the number four in the frame of the psalm corresponds well with the aforementioned word total of forty, or 4×10 . Other instances of the number four and ten are found in the psalm as a whole, specifically with regard to the iterations of the Tetragrammaton: YHWH is mentioned ten times in the body of the psalm, and four times in both the introduction and the conclusion as was just indicated.

A Psalm for YHWH, Not to Baal

These structural and numerical findings lead one to the conclusion that Ps 29 as it appears in the Masoretic Text is a faithfully preserved piece composed with a deliberate and meticulous structure. Any removal of a word or a verse would shatter this impressive edifice.⁵ For this reason one must dismiss any attempt to undermine the existing text, whether by taking a verse out and labeling it as secondary, by suggesting that the verses should be ordered differently,⁶ or by proposing that one should shift words from one verse to another⁷ or add words that were supposedly displaced.⁸ This

4. Some of these numerical findings were noted by Avishur, though he did not relate it to the parallel number of words. See Yitzhak Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 73–74.

5. A similar proposal was suggested by David Noel Freedman and C. Franke Hyland (“Psalm 29: Structural Analysis,” *HTR* 66 [1973]: 237–56) based on the number of syllables in each of the stanzas of the psalm. I prefer the division into stanzas proposed by Jan P. Fokkelman (Jan P. Fokkelman, *The Remaining Sixty-Five Psalms*, vol. 3 of *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible* [Assen: Van Gorcum 2003], 45), which differs from Freedman and Hyland’s proposal.

6. As was proposed, for example, by Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, AB 16 (New York: Doubleday, 1966): 178; and Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 154–55.

7. Thus, for example, one proposal to move the word כבוד (glory) from the end of v. 9 and place it at the beginning of v. 10 by Baruch Margulis, “A Ugaritic Psalm,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 303; Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 253; Benjamin D. Sommer, “A Little Higher Than Angels: Psalm 29 and the Genre of Heavenly Praise,” in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin*, ed. Maxine L. Grossman (Bethesda: University of Maryland, 2013), 141. For the meaning of the expression “And in his temple all cry, ‘Glory!’” (וּבְהִיכְלוֹ כָּלֹ אָמַר כְּבוֹד) (וּבְהִיכְלוֹ כָּלֹ אָמַר כְּבוֹד), see, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:360.

8. See, for example, Baruch Margulis, “The Canaanite Origin of Psalm 29 Reconsidered,” *Bib* 51 (1970): 234.

realization is vitally important, since it has critical ramifications for the scholarly discussion regarding the nature and origin of the psalm. Beginning with the analyses of Harold L. Ginsberg and Theodor H. Gaster, many scholars have argued that this psalm was Canaanite in its origin.⁹ According to these scholars, Ps 29 was originally a composition dedicated to Baal, which was appropriated by Israelite culture through the substitution of the Tetragrammaton for Baal's name.

Many of the scholars who held this point of view had difficulty with the last verse (29:11), which speaks about the strength the Lord grants his people and the blessing he bequeaths to them. These words do not fit with the supposed Baalistic origin, since no one has been able to identify any particular "national" ties specific to Baal.¹⁰ Hence, these scholars claimed that the final verse is a later addition.¹¹

However, considering the structural and numerical data presented above, one cannot remove this verse from its place at the end of the psalm, as it is an important part of the carefully conceived structure of this composition. Since verse 11 always referred to the God of Israel and since this verse is an integral part of the original psalm, one must conclude that P 29 in its entirety was written as a paean to the God of Israel, rather than to Baal.

Psalm 29 and Dan

If indeed Ps 29 is an Israelite composition the purpose of which is to grant Israel strength, how are we to understand the deep ties to Baal as he is portrayed in Ugaritic writings and to the geography of Syria and Lebanon?¹²

9. See Ginsberg, *The Writings of Ugarit*, 129–31; Harold L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter," *Atti XIX Congresso internazionale degli Orientalisti* 19 (1935): 472–76; Theodor H. Gaster, "Psalm 29," *JQR* 37 (1946–1947): 55–65. For a more current discussion on this matter, see Peter Machinist, "To Refer or Not to Refer: That Is the Question," in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017): 205–8.

10. The human collective referred to in Ugaritic writings is the city of Ugarit itself rather than any national identity.

11. Beginning with Ginsberg's *The Writings of Ugarit*, 131, and culminating in Machinist's "To Refer," 210.

12. Specifically the references to Lebanon and Sirion in v. 6. I accept Ginsberg's proposal (note 9, above) that the wilderness of Kadesh, mentioned in v. 8, is the Kadesh wilderness of Syria.

I suggest that the answer to this question may also be found in a close look at some of the structural and numerical elements of the psalm. At the heart of the psalm, as was indicated above, is verse 6:

He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf / and Sirion like a young wild ox.

וַיִּרְקֹדֵם כְּמוֹ-עֵגֶל לְבָנוֹן / וְשִׁרְיֹן כְּמוֹ בֶן-רֶאֱמִים

This verse, as I mentioned, is distinct from the surrounding verses, since the expression “the voice of the LORD” does not appear in it; in this way it resembles the beginning and the end of the psalm. The first half of the verse is the central colon of this psalm; before it there are eleven cola, and after it there are eleven cola. The word “calf” in this colon is the central word in the entire psalm, and it is surrounded by eighty-eight words: forty-four before it and forty-four after it.

My recently published article regarding the numerical structure of the Song of Deborah highlighted the importance of the numbers eleven, forty-four, and eighty-eight in that composition.¹³ In light of these findings, I wish to propose that these numbers were also important for the author of Ps 29.¹⁴ For this reason I argue that the centrality of this middle colon with eleven cola both before and after it and the location of the word “calf” in the exact center of the psalm with forty-four words both before and after are not coincidental.

As is well known, the calf was the central religious symbol of YHWH worship in the northern kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kgs 12:18–30).¹⁵ One of the two centers where the calf represented God’s presence was the city of

13. See Israel Knohl, “The Original Version of *Deborah’s* Song, and Its Numerical Structure,” *VT* 66 (2016): 45–65.

14. For the thematic connection between the Song of Deborah and Psalm 29, see Peter C. Craigie, “Psalm XXIX in the Hebrew Poetic Tradition,” *VT* 22 (1972): 148.

15. Verse 6 does not describe God as sitting or standing upon the calf but rather compares the trembling of mountains before YHWH to the dancing of a calf or a wild ox. It thus resembles Ps 114:4: “The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.” One may find here, however, an echo of the image of the storm god and a pair of oxen. For instances of this image, see Mark S. Smith, “Counting Calves at Bethel,” in *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford (Jerusalem: Albright Institute/Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 338–39.

Dan,¹⁶ on the slopes of Mount Hermon, or, as it is referred to in the central verse of this psalm, Sirion.¹⁷

Indeed, every verse of Ps 29 mentions the Tetragrammaton at least once, except for the central verse of the psalm, verse 6, where the Tetragrammaton is not mentioned once. Why is the name of God missing in the central verse of the psalm of all places? It seems that the answer to this conundrum is the reference in verse 6 to the “calf” and the name “Sirion,” which were both connected to the worship of God in northern Israel: in this verse God is represented not by his name but rather by his cultic symbol, the calf, and through his special mountain, Sirion/Hermon, which was seen in ancient Israel and in neighboring cultures as the residence of the divinity.¹⁸

During the biblical period, not far from Dan were cultic sites dedicated to Baal worship, specifically Baal Gad and Baal Hermon.¹⁹ At this juncture I do not wish to consider whether these two names refer to separate sites or one site, nor do I want to offer my view of the exact geographical location(s) of this/these place(s). In any case, the mention of Sirion/Hermon in verse 6 as connected with the calf/young wild ox suggests that Ps 29 may have been written at the cultic center of Dan.²⁰ This conjecture may explain the author’s familiarity with northern geography and the affinity with Baal in Canaanite poetry.

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16. A tablet with the image of an ox was discovered at the Dan excavations; see Avraham Biran, “Two Bronze Plaques and the Huṣṣot of Dan,” *IEJ* 49 (1999): 43–45.

17. For the identification of Sirion as Mount Hermon, see Deut 3:9. While it is true that the עגל is mentioned just before the other mountain, Lebanon, the parallel words בן ראמים are directly connected with the Sirion.

18. See Israel Knohl, “Psalm 68: Structure, Composition and Geography,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012), doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2012.v12.a15.

19. Baal Gad (Josh 11:17; 12:7; 13:5); Baal Hermon (Judg 3:3; 1 Chr 5:23).

20. The conjecture that this psalm was written in the north was suggested as early as Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, HKAT 2/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 125; Gary A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, SBLMS 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 35–37.

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lished by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin. Edited by Maxine L. Grossman. Bethesda: University of Maryland, 2013.

Revisiting Edward L. Greenstein's "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job"

Adriane Leveen

"Who is this who darkens counsel, in words without knowledge" (Job 38:2)?¹ Thus does YHWH respond to Job's increasingly urgent demand for an explanation after the sudden loss of his children, excruciating boils on his skin, and the increasingly offensive rebukes of his companions. But Job is not the one who has darkened counsel. That act lies with his companions and in God's silence, over many hours, perhaps days, of interrogating Job's fate and its causes. It is true that Job's knowledge of those causes is limited. But we, on the other hand, are not ignorant. From the opening chapter we have been privy to God's willingness to allow the Adversary to destroy Job's family and ruin his health in order to determine whether Job would continue to be faithful to God in dark times as well as good. Our knowledge of their wager leads to even more questions. It is God's unfathomable actions, rather than Job's demand for a divine accounting, that call for scrutiny and judgment. Since the book's inception until this day, interpreters of Job continue to pursue an explanation for its characterization of God's behavior.

Edward L. Greenstein stands out among those in this pursuit. His prolific and wide-ranging articles and commentaries on Job encompass literary criticism, philological analysis, translation issues, and theological reflection. Greenstein tackles the problem of God's motives and behavior in a 2009 essay, "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job."² He places the

1. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Edward Greenstein's comments on particular phrases were helpful.

2. Edward L. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job," in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, ed. Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (Winona Lake,

question of evil in Job in the context of the biblical principle of just divine retribution. The good are rewarded. The wicked are punished. Yet the suffering of a pious and obedient figure such as Job introduces the problem of evil, especially since it appears that he has suffered for no good reason. Job's terrible punishments defy the calculus set out by just divine retribution. As put by Greenstein: "Evil presupposes intent to inflict suffering without justifiable cause."³ That definition fits God's wager with the Adversary against Job. Greenstein is skeptical that one could find a *justifiable* cause when it comes to God's behavior. At the very least, Greenstein argues that the book of Job discards the concept of just divine retribution as an operating principle.

Many chapters in Job are devoted to a passionate debate between Job and his companions on the question of God's motives, whether just retribution or a more arbitrary divine act, and whether Job's suffering is or is not deserved. The companions' increasingly vociferous justification of God in light of Job's increasingly angry critique is an attempt at theodicy, defined as "the effort to justify God's goodness and power given the existence of evil."⁴ In her writing, Judith Plaskow subjects the notion of divine motivation to a harsh critique, especially in those cases, as in Job, where, "either God could not prevent evil or God would not."⁵ Steven Kepnes adds another dimension to the quest for theodicy by defining its ultimate goal: "to embrace justice and hope out of the situation of despair."⁶ After a close reading of Greenstein's essay, I will place it in conversation with the readings of Job provided by Plaskow and Kepnes.

All three writers have in common the importance of speaking the truth of God as they have discerned it in Job while contending with the question of evil. Each also has a personal stake in the work. Greenstein expresses admiration for Job's intellectual honesty and refusal to acquiesce to God after the storm.⁷ Plaskow remembers reading Job as a young person.

IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 333–62. Greenstein's essays and email exchanges about Job have accompanied my teaching and writing as cherished and illuminating resources.

3. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 333–34.

4. Judith Plaskow, "Wrestling with God and Evil," in *Chapters of the Heart*, ed. Sue Levi Elwell and Nancy Fuchs Kreimer (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 85–93, here 89.

5. Plaskow, "Wrestling with God and Evil," 87.

6. Steven Kepnes, "Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy," in *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson (London: Routledge, 2002), 35–55, here 36.

7. Personal interview, summer 2017.

I saw God as a great bully saying, in effect, it's my game; if you don't like it, take your marbles and go home. My immersion in the *Book of Job* fed my fascination with the problem of evil as well as my understanding of God as responsible for evil along with good.⁸

Kepnes notes that Job "retains its relevance to address even the radical forms of human suffering which we have seen in the century which has just passed."⁹ Read singly or in conversation, these three are far more clear-headed about Job's situation and God's actions than Job's three biblical companions. This is especially true of Greenstein, who puts God on trial on Job's behalf.

Speaking of God

Early on, Greenstein's essay articulates two issues of paramount interest in his reading of the book of Job: the foundation for knowledge of God and how forthright one can be in discussing God.¹⁰ Job and his companions turn to different sources to form their arguments against one another. The companions rely on traditions (influenced particularly by Deuteronomic ideas but not exclusively so), while Job relies on his experience of present suffering and the life he lived until that point.¹¹ It becomes clear to Job that God has acted unjustly to him. "Know then that God has subverted me; surrounded me with his net" (19: 6). As a result, Job seeks as honest an accounting from God as he has tried to provide his companions about his changing views of God. "Indeed I would speak to Shaddai; I desire to reprove El" (13:3).

Job ponders how to build a case that could become a "full-fledged lawsuit against God" in spite of assuming he does not stand a chance of winning.¹²

8. Plaskow, "Wrestling with God," 86.

9. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 37.

10. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 335.

11. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 335. Greenstein identifies God's revelation to Job as another source of knowledge. See also Greenstein's "'On My Skin and in My Flesh': Personal Experience as a Source of Knowledge in the Book of Job," in *Bringing the Hidden to Light: Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller*, ed. Kathryn F. Kravitz and Diane M. Sharon (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 63–77.

12. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 336.

How then can I answer him,
 choose my words against him?
 Even if I was in the right I could not answer,
 but I would plead to him who judges me.
 If I called and he responded to me,
 I do not believe that he would give ear to my voice.
 Who for a hair would crush me
 and multiply my wounds without cause....
 and if of justice—who can summon him for me? ...
 For he is not a man like me that I can answer him,
 that we should come together in judgment.
 There is no arbiter between us
 to lay his hand on us both. (9:14–17, 19b, 32–33)

In other words, even if a trial could be granted, God and Job are unequal opponents. Even if found, could an arbiter ensure that Job receive a fair trial?

It would surely not be the companions, who are shocked by his words and find them deeply threatening. Job finally walks away from them without coming to an agreement about the justice of God's ways. "Ended are the words of Job, and these three men ceased from replying to Job, since he was justified in his own eyes" (31:40–32:1).

Only God can announce who has spoken the truth. At the end of the book God instructs the companions to seek out Job and entreat him to pray to God on their behalf, explaining, "You have not spoken about me correctly, as did my servant Job" (Job 42:7). This final divine verdict is a response to the issue identified by Greenstein and illustrates just how essential that issue is in Job. God requires a truthful, even if brutally harsh, assessment of God's actions.

Greenstein's critical interpretation of these events sets before us a case history against the God whom Job encounters, and whom we encounter, in the book that bears his name. Greenstein serves as Job's advocate, sharpening his argument and collecting the evidence for an indictment against God. In effect, he puts Job's God on trial. He points out God's role in the prologue in drawing the Adversary's attention to Job—a simple, pious figure—out of pride in his loyal servant as a virtuous figure. God is the instigator, not the Adversary. Greenstein ironically notes that God allows the Adversary to punish Job precisely because he is virtuous rather than a sinner.¹³ Without

13. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 340.

hesitation God agrees to the adversary’s test of Job. Greenstein defines the goal of this test from God’s point of view:

[It] is to probe Job’s devotion to God by testing its depth. How much torture will Job endure and still remain faithful to God? How perfect is his devotion? This is something YHWH does not know, and he is willing to go to extreme lengths to find out.¹⁴

The prologue is the scene of the crime, setting the terms for Greenstein’s indictment of God.

From the prologue we learn that God is an abusive victimizer and that Job is his faithful and submissive servant, ready to suffer every pain and indignity for the sake of his piety. We also learn that from the perspectives of the narrator, the deity and Job in the prologue, the doctrine of just retribution is not functional—it certainly does not explain the suffering of Job. It is some personal need of God for which Job suffers.¹⁵

The problem of evil at this stage does not seem to bother God, the Adversary, or Job, though the writer certainly draws the reader’s attention to it. As his indignation grows, Greenstein’s language becomes even sharper:

God’s torture of Job, blow after blow, in order to test the extent of his devotion represents a typical sadomasochistic relationship ... an aggressive party brutally dominates a submissive party in a manner that is analogous to the master-slave relation.¹⁶

Greenstein gathers the evidence from Job’s description of his suffering and persecution to justify his brutal assessment of God’s behavior. He cites Job’s plaintive cry in 7:17–18: “What is man that you elevate him, that you fix upon him your attention? You inspect him every morning; every moment you examine him.” Job does not glory in such divine attention because he experiences it as brutally relentless. The parallelism in the verse neatly makes the point. It is perhaps hard to be inspected by God every morning, but it is even worse when God does so each moment. There can be

14. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 340.

15. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 342.

16. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 341–42. Greenstein (341 n. 40) cites Peter Berger’s use of the term “religious masochism vis-à-vis the Biblical God” in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 74–75.

no escape. Nor does Job mince words: "In his anger he tears and is hostile against me; he gnashes his teeth at me" (Job 16:9). Greenstein follows his lead, citing 19:11–12, in which Job describes God as a chief who targets him as an enemy and sends his troops to attack him. This reference is telling, as it foreshadows God's rhetorical attack on Job in the whirlwind speech of 38:1–42:7 in language suggestive of the battlefield.

Unlike a number of critics who see the prologue and the whirlwind speeches as distinct sources, Greenstein argues that the God who speaks out of the whirlwind "is not significantly different from the God who has been experienced by Job in the prose narrative [prologue] and the poetic dialogues."¹⁷ Greenstein highlights the consistency in God's character, describing the God of the whirlwind in chilling terms:

The deity attacks Job aggressively out of the storm in the manner of a warrior god, in a way that can only confirm Job's perception all along that he is being attacked by God as though by a hostile army (e.g., 19:11–12). God's questions to Job—"Where were you when...? Do you know...? Can you...?"—are calculated to demean Job, to mock his ignorance and incompetence.... Here, YHWH appears as the sadistic and self-centered deity of the prologue.¹⁸

Greenstein treats God's words as self-incriminating testimony against divine behavior.

God follows such rapid-fire mockery of Job by taking him on a stunningly poetic grand tour of the natural world. The tour includes the site where God contained the waters (38:8–11), the sources of the sea and the gates of death (38:16–17). Each example reinforces the smallness of this human being who dares to demand a day in court. God's response aims to intimidate and terrify Job.

Greenstein focuses in particular on dangerous animals who easily ravage and destroy a human, such as the lion. He wonders what they "suggest about the Creator whom they in some way reflect?"¹⁹ They are wild and cruel creatures that prey on the weak. Or they inhabit a sphere completely beyond human life, with our values and virtues. Job 39:26–27 evokes the hawk and the eagle, magnificent birds that literally glide far above and out of our visual range:

17. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 353.

18. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 353.

19. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 354.

Does the hawk soar by your wisdom,
spread his wings to the south?
By your word does the eagle mount
and set his nest on high?

Greenstein draws attention to God's lack of compassion and concern for the human being or his fate in these verses.²⁰

The Leviathan and the Behemoth are God's most magisterial examples of terrifying beasts. A few verses about the Behemoth will suffice to remind us of these foreboding creatures.

He makes his tail stand like a cedar;
his thighs' sinews twine together.
His bones are bars of bronze,
his limbs like iron rods....
Can he be taken by his eyes,
with barbs pierce his nose? (Job 40:17–18, 24)²¹

The answer, of course, is a resounding no. Job is left to feel small, insignificant, and powerless in the face of a God who could create such a creature.

Greenstein closely analyzes Job's answers to God's whirlwind speeches as confirmation of Job's case against divine behavior. Job reveals his acquired understanding that God cares about power but not justice. Greenstein begins by claiming hitherto undisclosed evidence: "To my mind, nearly all readers of Job are, like virtually all translators of Job, operating with a poor philological understanding of Job's responses to God. Job is not accepting of his lot; he is defiant to the end."²² By highlighting Job's defiance against a perceived injustice, Greenstein makes explicit his admiration of Job.

Job offers God two answers. Greenstein argues that the first reply, 40:3–5, could be read in two ways. Job acknowledges that he is "of little

20. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 357. For God's indifference to the fate of human beings, see also Greenstein, "In Job's Face/Facing Job," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Fiona C. Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions, SemeiaSt 36 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 300–317, here 304–5.

21. Translation based on Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); and *The Book of Job: A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980).

22. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 357.

weight” and cannot reply to God. Alternatively, Greenstein proposes that Job is: “simply acknowledging what he had always contended: there is no responding to the deity because he intimidates his challengers with overwhelming might and terror.”²³ Job follows these words by placing his hand over his mouth. Greenstein’s analysis of the gesture in its other biblical appearances yields different interpretations of its meaning. These include astonishment, attentiveness, or feeling stunned.²⁴ Greenstein interprets the gesture here as Job’s encouragement that God continue.

Greenstein’s interpretation of Job’s second answer is crucial to his entire reading, validating Greenstein’s view of Job as defiant until the end when faced with a cruel and sadistic God. In Job’s second response he declares (in Greenstein’s translation of 42:2–3a, 4):

I know that you can do anything and no scheme of yours can be blocked.
Who is this who conceals counsel without knowledge.... Hear now and
I will speak; I will ask you and you will inform me.²⁵

Greenstein points out that these phrases “are nearly verbatim repetitions of what the Lord had said in confronting Job (38:2–3; 40:7). Job is mimicking God, and mimicry is the most quintessential form of parody.”²⁶ Responding with parody to such a grand tour of the glories and powers of the Creator is an act of distance and rebellion. Job rejects God’s parade of power and threats as appropriate responses to Job’s demand for an accounting. But Job has grown to expect, and is resigned to, such divine posturing. As put by Greenstein, “the God of the whirlwind is not the God of justice and divine providence.”²⁷ Job’s last words in the entire book, 42:6, are key for Greenstein, who understands Job to be saying: “I am fed up! I take pity on wretched humanity!” instead of the more typical “therefore I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes.”²⁸ Greenstein’s translation is crucial to his interpretation and allows him to rest his case on behalf of Job.²⁹

23. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 357.

24. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 357–58 for further details.

25. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 359.

26. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 359 and for the continuation of his comments. Greenstein notes that 42:3b is often misunderstood. Job understands, as he did in his earlier speeches, that God uses his divine power without regard to justice.

27. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 355.

28. Translation from *The Book of Job*.

29. See Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil,” 358–60, for his reasoning.

The only well-founded philological understanding of Job 42:6 is that Job is expressing his disgust over the fact that humanity must endure a miserable existence, which is precisely what Job had said in his initial complaint: "Why is light given to one who suffers/ and life to those bitter of spirit?" (3:20). Job loathes God's nature, but he has come to some understanding of what it is.³⁰

Through his translation Greenstein defends Job's appraisal of divine behavior and his stance of defiance by highlighting the kind of deity imagined in the book. God's behavior is unwarranted, yet God expects to be "revered unconditionally."³¹ Greenstein's argument makes clear that the *presence* of evil in the book of Job originates with and in God as portrayed by the biblical writer. His point is sharpened through his deeply unsettling characterization of God as sadomasochistic. Using such language can only make explicit the brutal and selfish qualities in God's behavior while at the same time supporting Job.

Greenstein traces the writer's description of divine behavior in other biblical examples.

In the book of Job we encounter a deity who is capable of doing good but can equally do bad for his own reasons. Although, at first blush, this may seem to be a radical departure from the biblical tradition, on further reflection one finds a similar outlook concerning the deity in the Torah and elsewhere.... The expectation of just, and therefore orderly, behavior from God is undermined by many biblical episodes before it is exploded in Job.³²

The list includes God's preference for Abel over Cain, the demand that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, the attack on Moses as he returns to Egypt at God's behest, and the deaths of Nadab and Abihu.

Highlighting the connection between these texts and God's behavior in Job leaves unsolved the *problem* of evil in the essay's title. Greenstein's final words on the subject suggest that we must accept the lack of any explanation for evil in God or in the world that could satisfy us. In fact, by seeking an explanation we assume one can be found. Greenstein's essay leaves us after all with unknowing, as God suggested to Job at the opening

30. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 360.

31. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 352.

32. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 361.

of the whirlwind speeches. Greenstein quotes a fourth figure, Elihu, who anticipates God's claim from the whirlwind that "God's *modus operandi* is beyond human ken. As a consequence, neither Job nor any other person is in a position to understand why God does what God does. It is a mystery."³³

Greenstein offers some solace in the search, especially in relying on one's experience as the foundation of knowledge of the divine, even if unpalatable and even if rejected by others. Facing the truth, however bleak, offers "wretched humanity" integrity and dignity. It is certainly preferred to a principle such as just divine retribution that misreads, and thus misleads, some of those who suffer further in life due to that belief.

The Ground of Being

Judith Plaskow considers Job and the question of evil in an essay she wrote and then elaborated upon in her coauthored work with Carol P. Christ, *Goddess and God in the World*, titled "Wrestling with God and Evil."³⁴ She does not explicitly respond to Greenstein's essay. Their conceptions of God are dissimilar, but I am struck by the similarities in their appraisal of God's attitude toward Job. Both recognize the presence and problem of evil in the work, emphasize the cruelty found in nature alongside its beauty, and admire Job's integrity as expressed in his continued defiance. Placing the two in a textual conversation lends support to Greenstein's reading of Job as a heroic figure, while Plaskow's more balanced view of God as good and bad mitigates Greenstein's stinging indictment.

Before turning to her analysis, I want to make explicit an important difference between the two of them. As a theologian Plaskow describes how the development of her personal theology influences her reading of the book of Job. As a biblical scholar, Greenstein is interested in the theology of Job's writer rather than in explicating his own theology.

Plaskow demands that religion be honest and comprehensive. It should provide: "a map of the universe in all its messiness.... And, where appropriate, challenge it. A concept of God that did not leave out the world's terrors was far more satisfying to me than one that crystallized ideals."³⁵

33. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil," 349.

34. Plaskow's essay is in *Chapters of the Heart*, cited in n. 4. Her chapter is in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

35. Christ and Plaskow, *Goddess and God*, 172.

Only a truthful accounting of God and a clear-eyed view of the world can legitimate religious thinking. That is true not only of the readings of both Greenstein and Plaskow but also of the book of Job.

Plaskow's map includes an appreciation of nature in its glory and in its terrors. She pinpoints the moment in which her ideas of God and the problem of evil in Job are transformed into a coherent and integrated whole, thanks to a revelatory insight into the natural world. Plaskow describes her reaction to the Iguassu Falls on the border of Brazil and Argentina.

the energy, potency and beauty of the water, were incredibly energizing and empowering.... On the other hand, the waters knew no moral purpose; they could as easily overwhelm and destroy as nourish and vivify.... they could lift up and sustain or engulf and annihilate. I had seen the face of God, and it brought home to me the complex and multifaceted nature of all creativity, human and divine.³⁶

Remember that for Greenstein the foundation of knowledge for Job is his own experience versus the friends' reliance on tradition. Plaskow relies on observation of the natural world as another source.

Her experience at the Iguassu Falls triggers Plaskow's renewed attention to God's speech from the whirlwind. The same power to destroy along with its cruel indifference to human life that she glimpsed in the breathtaking cascade of waters is also present in the brutal, ruthless, and predatory creatures so well described by Greenstein in his reading of the whirlwind speech. But Plaskow focuses not only on the darkness and cruelty present in nature but also on its glory and majesty. God's description of the natural world celebrates "the wonders of a strange and mysterious creation that preexists human beings and that has its own order and meaning. The natural world of God's reply to Job ... is unrestrained, turbulent, powerful, joyous and beautiful."³⁷

Plaskow's rich insight into the natural world leads her to a deeper comprehension of the God who takes Job on a tour of creation. Nature becomes a mirror of the divine forces evident in the world. Since she is writing a personal theology, Plaskow is not limited by the characterization of God in Job that instigates Greenstein's essay. She is free to propose a more expansive theological understanding. For Plaskow, "God" signifies

36. Christ and Plaskow, *Goddess and God*, 173.

37. Christ and Plaskow, *Goddess and God*, 188.

the source of all being, “the ground and wellspring of life.”³⁸ Such a force does not target humans or act intentionally against them in the sadistic manner identified by Greenstein. Nor does it help us or know that we exist. Plaskow and Greenstein do have in common the understanding that the God of the whirlwind is amoral and unconcerned with justice. She argues, “indeed, the very word ‘concern’ unduly personalizes the Ground of Being that sustains and enlivens all that is, good, bad and indifferent.”³⁹

Plaskow describes God’s divine message to Job out of the whirlwind in a paraphrase whose import sounds strikingly similar to Greenstein’s reading:

Right, the author of the speeches imagines God as saying to Job, the order of the universe is not founded on justice. It is not about you or your human standards. The world is about other things entirely: creativity, beauty, diversity, power, energy.⁴⁰

One will not discover a direct divine justification to Job for his suffering because God does not operate that way. Indeed, Plaskow experiences God in the pulsating energy, positive and destructive, underlying all of life.

Who, then, hears and responds to Job’s demand for justice? How shall we view his persistence in making that request? For Plaskow, just as for Greenstein, the decisive answers are found in chapter 42. God rebukes Job’s companions, warns them to ask Job to intercede on their behalf to avoid divine punishment, and admits that Job has spoken truthfully about God. Only in the human realm will Job find some justice and perhaps solace. Greenstein and Plaskow share a palpable admiration for Job’s persistence and his intact integrity. Plaskow puts it well.

Lambasted by his supposed comforters, hemmed in on all sides, he still refuses to say what he knows to be false—that the good are rewarded and the wicked punished. Second, Job refuses to relinquish the yearning for the justice he fails to see in the world. Finding set before him life and death, first blessing and then curse, he chooses life in the form of speaking truth and demanding justice. This is our task as human beings in the face of an all-embracing God: to affirm the ties that bind us to each other and creation, and to be the justice required for creation to flourish.⁴¹

38. Plaskow, “Wrestling with God and Evil,” 89

39. Plaskow, “Wrestling with God and Evil,” 92.

40. Plaskow, “Wrestling with God and Evil,” 92.

41. Plaskow, “Wrestling with God and Evil,” 92–93.

Evil remains a problem in the book of Job, but Plaskow does have a response. We can emulate Job's persistence in combatting injustice and evil.

Personifying God

Steven Kepnes's "Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy" has much to say implicitly to Greenstein but *is* explicitly in conversation with Martin Buber. Methodologically, Kepnes borrows the term "existential exegesis" from Buber. He defines the phrase as a "meeting" between the biblical text and a reader's present moment.⁴² I find the idea particularly fitting for the book of Job, since it repeatedly triggers impassioned and poignant responses in its readers, including its critics. Kepnes explains:

Here, the distant and ancient text aligns itself with the soul of the interpreter so that he realizes that it is his life "that is being addressed." Here Buber suggests "the cry transmitted to us by scripture becomes our own cry."⁴³

Kepnes also relies upon a second methodological approach: textual reasoning. As an example of textual reasoning, Kepnes identifies four responses in Job to suffering that are personified in four different figures. The view of each is "suspended in a dialogue which is not hierarchically ordered or resolved."⁴⁴ Job's wife argues that God is unjust, his friends that Job is sinful. Job experiences a "rent" in the universe, while God observes Job's power to withstand his suffering.⁴⁵ Kepnes considers these approaches in interaction rather than favoring any one of them. I take up only Kepnes's reading of Job and God in interaction with Greenstein and Plaskow.

42. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 40. The term "existential exegesis" comes from Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1952), 6.

43. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 40. The first quote from Buber embedded in Kepnes's description can be found in Martin Buber, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," in *On the Bible*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11. Kepnes refers to the source in subsequent citations as OTB. The second quote is taken from "The Dialogue between Heaven and Earth," (1951) in *On Judaism*, ed. Nahman Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1967), 224.

44. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 37

45. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 37.

"Although it may be true that suffering has no good meaning," writes Kepnes, "there certainly are meaningful responses to suffering."⁴⁶ Job's reaction to his suffering moves from resignation to a wish that he had never been born to anger. His anger originates in his recognition that his view of the world has been shattered, replaced by a deep distrust in God, though not a suspension of belief in God. Kepnes quotes Buber's description of the aftermath of such a rent in Job's life.

he is no longer able to have a single faith in God and in justice.... He believes now in justice in spite of believing in God, and he believes in God in spite of believing in justice. But he cannot forego his claim that they will again be united somewhere, sometime.⁴⁷

While Job's anger and persistence in demanding justice may be cathartic, it does not offer a resolution to the problem of evil and God's role in the infliction of suffering on Job, his wife, and his family.⁴⁸

Kepnes turns to God's speech from the whirlwind in search of such a resolution. He emphasizes the significance Buber places on God's willingness to appear to Job. Such an appearance creates hope in Job that God might yet restore justice. But Buber concedes: "Nothing is explained, nothing adjusted; wrong has not become right, nor cruelty kindness. Nothing has happened but that man again hears God's address. The mystery has remained unsolved."⁴⁹ Kepnes's use of the quote echoes the identification of God's dark side in Plaskow and Greenstein. He shares with Greenstein an acknowledgement of the unsolved mystery of God's behavior.

Finding only confirmation of God's dark side in the whirlwind speech leads our three writers to emphasize the significance of the book's ending. According to Kepnes, God's affirmation of Job's critical understanding of divine behavior illustrates Buber's idea of distributive justice. "God justifies and vindicates not His own actions but those of Job.... the meaning of this term 'distributive justice' seems to be something like: 'We get what we can handle.'"⁵⁰ If Kepnes had concluded his essay at that point in the reading, he would have left unanswered the problem of God's motives in afflicting Job. But he is not yet done.

46. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 39.

47. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 48, citing Buber, *On The Bible*, 192.

48. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 49.

49. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 50, citing Buber, "Dialogue between Heaven" 224.

50. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 51

Instead, Kepnes reminds us that God's response is the fourth personified possibility of the book. He places it in dialogue with the other three (Job's wife, his friends, Job himself). Textual reasoning leads Kepnes to ask of God's stance:

Why is the ability to endure suffering the mark of the *eved Hashem*, the servant of God? ... God's response to Job does not provide a final answer to the question of why the innocent Job and the innocent throughout history must suffer.⁵¹

Job's innocent suffering leads Kepnes to another section of Buber's essay "The Dialogue between Heaven and Earth," Buber's response to Auschwitz. Instead of the Job who relents after the whirlwind, the Job of protest becomes Buber's model and is eagerly, with relief, embraced by Kepnes. Greenstein's heroic Job echoes this alternative version. Job teaches us to persist and demand an answer, though Buber acknowledges it might be less than satisfactory. "Though his coming appearance resemble no earlier one, we shall recognize again our cruel and merciful Lord."⁵²

In response to a God both cruel and merciful, Kepnes proclaims in his own voice that like Job we must act against injustice. We cannot capitulate. We rebuild as "active agents of God's justice and redemption in the world.... it is our and not God's responsibility to ensure that justice prevails ... and ensure the end to human suffering and thereby make way for the recognition of the Lord."⁵³ Greenstein and Plaskow also emphasize human action rather than that of God in response to evil.

Rereading Job

Early in his essay Kepnes notes that, when faced with the problem of unjust suffering, readers may react "by either lessening God's goodness or power or compromising the innocence of the sufferer."⁵⁴ God remains powerful in these readings of Job but not particularly good. All three writers seem to emulate Job's devotion to truth when assessing divine behavior and are unflinchingly critical. But it is a matter of emphasis. Greenstein

51. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 52–53.

52. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 53, citing Buber, "Dialogue between Heaven" 225.

53. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 54

54. Kepnes, "Rereading Job," 39.

emphasizes God's sadism and hostility toward Job in language that leaves little room for any other possibility. Plaskow balances the good and the evil, since "the sacred encompasses the totality of existence in its positive and negative aspects."⁵⁵ After describing Buber's justification of God's distribution of justice—inflicting on Job what he can handle—Kepnes rejects that argument as inadequate and turns instead to a characterization of Job that is closer to that of Greenstein. All three understand that the God of Job cannot, or refuses to, respond to Job's charge of injustice. On the other hand, all three admire Job. Greenstein even strengthens his case.

The shift from God to human being as the purveyor of justice can be placed in a historical context. In a recent editorial Mara Benjamin notes:

In the 20th century, the great Central European Jewish thinkers—Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas—argued that our knowledge of God will always be mediated through human beings. In beholding our neighbor's vulnerability, we experience being commanded. In responding to the neighbor's need, we become moral agents. In becoming our neighbor's keeper, we come into contact with God.⁵⁶

Job is that neighbor, his vulnerability the call for support to which all three writers respond. Greenstein admires Job's defiance in standing up to God and his refusal to relinquish what he has learned of God. Plaskow and Kepnes explicitly take from Job's experience a call to moral action. Plaskow praises Job as a truthful man who never stops yearning for, and demanding, justice. Kepnes views Job as a figure who rebuilds his life in spite of catastrophe. All three praise Job at God's expense. They have spoken thus of God by knowing Job.

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55. Christ and Plaskow, *Goddess and God*, 280.

56. Mara Benjamin, private communication.

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The Grammar of Creation

Seth L. Sanders

In the Hebrew Bible, the story of God's defeat of a primordial monster at the origins of the universe is never really told. Instead it is typically *alluded to* as something in danger of being forgotten that urgently needs to be remembered. In addition, it is uniformly in the form of poetry, never narrative prose, addressed to God himself as a reminder of his own deeds. Yet if God's deed is never fully described, this only seems to increase its importance. Not only does this event shadow the prophecies of Isaiah and the Psalms; at crucial points it embodies their hope for Israel's future on that day of judgment, when "the LORD shall punish, with his severe, great, and mighty sword, Leviathan the elusive serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent; he will kill the dragon that is in the sea."¹

God's violent cosmic battle of creation has played a remarkable role in the history of Israelite and Western religion, in which it moves from a half-buried ancient past to an urgent apocalyptic future in which the universe will be remade. Its importance to biblical scholarship is signaled by the fact that Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos*, the first major synthesis, was also the first serious comparative study of biblical and ancient Near Eastern myth.² For some threads of ancient Judahite religion and politics, this

This paper is dedicated to Ed Greenstein, who is a powerful model for me in two ways: in his ability to use the fine grammatical and poetic details of a text to show us a new, sometimes revolutionary picture; and in his kindness and conscientiousness as a mentor. I am grateful for the insightful comments of the reviewer for this volume, which brought the paper up to date and saved me from errors on some key issues.

1. Isa 27:1; cf Hab 3 and Job 26. The relevant passages of Isa 51 and Pss 74 and 89 are the focus of the present paper. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

2. Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

battle was one of the building blocks of cosmic history, and it only grew in importance for later Jewish myth and messianism.³ Yet despite its importance, the poetic theme of God's dragon-slaying has been studied in a very lopsided way, with numerous studies of its content, origins, and ideology, but its poetic form treated as an afterthought, if at all.⁴

3. E.g., Frank Moore Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973], 137): "Nor is it by coincidence that, with the recrudescence of myth late in Israel's history, myths of creation, especially the battle with sea, came to be identified with the historical battle in which Yahweh won salvation for Israel."

4. The past few decades of research on this topic continue in what is really quite a conservative folkloristic and nationalist focus on plot and "native" versus "foreign" culture, tracing the Canaanite origins of the dragon-slaying theme and its evolution into an appropriately Israelite national myth. A quick survey of English-language works standing in this now-venerable academic tradition founded by Gunkel and elaborated by Umberto Cassuto (e.g., "The Israelite Epic" [Hebrew], *Keneset* 8 [1943]: 21–142; for a critique of the assumptions in Cassuto's piece see Seth Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, Traditions (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 30–32 with bibliography) yields: John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Carola Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1986); Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); David T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Debra Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Robert D. Miller, *The Dragon, the Mountain, and the Nations: An Old Testament Myth, Its Origins, and Its Afterlives*, Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations 6 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018); and Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). An important exception is Jeremy Hutton's "Isaiah 51:9–11 and the Rhetorical Appropriation and Subversion of Hostile Theologies," *JBL* 126 (2007): 271–303, despite the narrower focus indicated in the title. Two innovative recent studies by Noga Ayali-Darshan analyze the ancient Near Eastern dragon-slaying myth into two variants, an early version attested in second-millennium texts and a later version attested in the first millennium: "The Question of the Order of Job 26:7–13 and the Cosmogonic Tradition of Zaphon," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 402–17; and "The Other Version of the Story of the Storm-God's Combat with the Sea in the Light of Egyptian, Ugaritic, and Hurro-Hittite Texts," *JANER* 15 (2015): 20–51. The argument is important but relies heavily on reconstruction (e.g., the first article argues for a Canaanite cosmogonic myth in which the storm god creates two mountain abodes, Saphon and *Nannay, after his defeat of the dragon, which is not directly attested anywhere;

Why is the poetic form of the dragon-slaying myth so neglected, and what does that have to do with its role in the history of the religions of Israel? This paper takes a cue from Ed Greenstein's fundamental observation about biblical poetry, that it is in almost every instance presented as speech, yet "so simple and plain a phenomenon has almost completely escaped the notice of biblical scholars."⁵ To the philologist, what may be most remarkable about these violent creation accounts are their strict regimentation by genre and linguistic form: God only kills dragons in poetry.⁶ Allusions to God's defeat of a primordial monster are further restricted by the fact that they appear, without exception, in direct discourse, in the mouth of an implied speaker who will, for example, refer to God as "you" or give second-person imperatives to an audience of worshipers: God only kills dragons within quotation marks. Finally, none of the verbs describing God's actions has direct tense reference: God's victory is alluded to with prefix forms, suffix forms, and participles: God kills dragons in language that could take place today, tomorrow, or at the beginning or end of time.

The Priestly creation account that begins the Hebrew Bible exists at the opposite pole of the dragon-slaying story in terms of both language and genre: Gen 1:1–2:4a narrates a smooth series of acts of command, obedience, and cooperation narrated by an invisible and anonymous prose voice. The narrator never refers to himself, his audience, or his present time, and creation takes place as a sequence of clearly marked past events: every single sentence describing God's creative actions (from Gen 1:3 through 2:3) begins with a *wayyiqtol* form. If violent creation is always invoked in poetry, direct discourse, and tenseless verbs, creation by word appears in prose, anonymously narrated, and through cut-and-dried verb forms that fix it in the past.

But what is this pattern for? Why is God's violent creation invoked in poetry, while his serene verbal ordering is narrated in prose? Philology makes the pattern clear, and, I will argue, it is precisely the kind of

similarly, the early Canaanite myth reconstructed in the second article is only directly attested in the Egyptian Astarte Papyrus).

5. "Direct Discourse and Parallelism" in *Discourse, Dialogue, and Debate in the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 79.

6. By contrast, as my graduate student Aron Tillema reminds me (pers. comm. 2018), creation itself is prominently narrated in the prose of Gen 1. Even more remarkable is that this is the sole exception to the broader pattern of creation being narrated in poetry.

linguistically rigorous and poetically sensitive philology that Greenstein has modeled for us that can help us understand it.

1. From Background and Influence to Comparison

Influential accounts, such as those of Frank Moore Cross, have seen this violent creation as an archaic myth from Israel's ancient Near Eastern past, as attested in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and the Ugaritic *Baal epic*.⁷ This archaic heritage is suppressed by the Priestly source of the Torah but remembered in biblical poetry. In this view the differences in language and theme between the two conflict stories is explained by archaism: the conflict myth is a cultural and grammatical survival.

The intense focus on influence and archaism—to the role of Ugaritic texts as a “background” to the Bible, for example—has drawn our attention away from an equally productive comparative approach to literary features of both the biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts under consideration; read on their own terms, the texts may reveal more than mere borrowing.⁸

The focus here will be on three instances of the violent creation myth in the Bible, those found in Ps 74 and 89 and Isa 51. My contention will be that our understanding of what these texts are doing can be clarified if we pay more, not less, attention to the individual features of both the biblical texts and their ancient Near Eastern cognates

In the history of biblical interpretation, the remote past narrative of Gen 1:1–2:4 in which the world is sedately created by divine word has sat uneasily alongside cryptic, and personal, invocations of a primeval battle. To understand the linguistic significance of our texts, it is important to see that the split between creation by word and creation by sword falls along the same lines that divide Biblical Hebrew grammar, in modern analysis. An opposition has long been perceived, at least since the time of Bishop Lowth, discoverer of biblical poetic parallelism, between the grammatical systems of the Bible's prose versus its poetry. Scholars such as Dennis Pardee see this opposition as primary, extending back to Ugaritic. Another

7. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, followed by Day and Batto.

8. As we shall see below, a careful look at the second-millennium Akkadian and Northwest Semitic materials does not support this thesis: no storm god actually creates the universe by killing a dragon in a known Bronze Age text. The distinctive form of this myth is an innovation first attested in Hebrew and Assyrian sources of the Iron Age, and the first known examples are roughly contemporary with Iron Age Biblical Hebrew.

basic opposition can be seen between the Bible's narrative versus its direct discourse, as scholars from Mark Smith to Roy Heller have argued. These fault lines meet in our texts.

In 1895, Hermann Gunkel published his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, the first convincing scholarly solution to the problem of conflicting creation accounts. Gunkel's was the first modern study methodically to show that the Hebrew Bible itself was already interpreting traditions from its own ancient past; indeed, Gunkel implicitly placed the sort of biblical literature he treated in the same category as scholars now place midrash. By reading the newly discovered Babylonian epic of creation as the Bible's own traditional background—the Old Testament of the Old Testament, as it were—Gunkel at once inaugurated a new way of reading biblical texts and joined a debate that was already old. This debate concerns the nature, not so much of God's actions, but of how humans relate them, and relate to them: What relationship is thereby established between the time of God's actions and the present?

For contrast, it is helpful to look at the only creation account that actually appears in narrative prose. Genesis 11:1–2:4a, not coincidentally, is the one that begins the Bible and structures the Priestly work of the Torah. Although the narrator is anonymous and invisible, God is the subject and sole agent of every sentence here, and every day is ordered by his speaking. What is more, God's language appears at the highest pragmatic level of any text in the Hebrew Bible. He begins with the jussive “Let there be light!” (יהי אור, 1:3), then a naming, “God called the light Day” (ויקרא אלהים לאור, 1:5), moving on to an imperative blessing, “Be fruitful and multiply!” (ויברך אתם אלהים לאמר פרו ורבו, 1:22), and a performative promise, “I hereby give you every seed-bearing plant” (הנה נתתי לכם את-כל-עשב זרע, 1:29), then concluding with the crowning double pragmatic acts of “blessing and sanctifying” (ויברך אלהים את-היום השביעי ויקדש אתו) in Gen 2:3. Indeed, this ordered catalog of verb forms and life forms, foundational for the Priestly thread of the Pentateuch, presents a token of every major type of pragmatically marked speech.

One can find a complete catalog of explicit pragmatic Hebrew from God's utterances here, but it is a monologue. Alternative, poetic accounts in Psalms, Isaiah, and Job⁹ repeatedly name other beings who

9. For Isa 51 and Pss 74 and 89 see below; cf. Job 7:12, 40:25; Ezek 29:3; 32:2; Ps 104.

were present at the creation, but these beings are absent from biblical prose, which does not speak the names of Tannin or Leviathan even a single time.¹⁰

Gunkel's solution to this difference between genres was diachronic, the idea that there were ancient archaic forms being repressed. Frank Moore Cross brought this diachronic approach to its most refined form, placing different poetic and prose accounts of cosmic battle into an evolutionary typology, where an early poetic pattern of cosmic battle is replaced by a later prose narrative exemplified by the contrast between the song of the sea, Exod 15, and the prose version that precedes it. Michael Fishbane, by contrast, treats the contrast synchronically, with the two modes of creation as alternative variants: a *logos* creation by divine word and an *agon* creation by divine combat.¹¹

Yet no one has explained the striking overall pattern that the different modes of creation form: *logos* creation in sedate narratives, *agon* creation in urgent poetic appeals. If the two creation accounts are equal alternatives, we are left with the question of why myth is never narrated in the Hebrew Bible yet invoked so passionately at historical turning points.

In discussing the poetics of primordial acts used as warrants, it is instructive to begin with a surprising instance of how an ancient deed can be drawn on at a moment of crisis; this is, quite literally, the word "deed." In his magisterial study of the transition *From Memory to Written Record* in England, historian M. T. Clanchy explains how medieval England went through a process of change analogous to that of the spread of literacy in Iron Age Israel. By the thirteenth century CE, written documents had become the primary instruments to perform legal actions. In earlier times, words had not been the only or even the primary way this was done; the act of physically conveying a piece of land was a ritual to gain the right to land, and *deed* referred to this deed. But by the late thirteenth century, in law, *deed* no longer referred to

10. Though of course *tanninim*, the category of great sea creatures (perhaps "monsters" or "whales"), are mentioned in Gen 1:21.

11. See his *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). There is room for variety: the second origin narrative in Genesis involves creation by crafting, and Ps 33, for example, seems to show God defeating the sea by his word, rather than his arm, and has grammatical features of both poetry and prose.

the physical action but to the written words memorializing the act of conveyance.¹²

At least, this is what King Edward I was encouraging people to think. During his reign judges instituted proceedings to demand written warrants for the traditional rights held by the nobles. Yet some still defended older oral traditions about where rights really came from and what kind of deeds really mattered. In one manuscript of the *Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough* we read:

The king disturbed some of the great men of the land through his judges wanting to know by what warrant they held their lands, and if they did not have a good warrant, he immediately seized their lands. Among the rest, the Earl Warrenne was called before the king's judges. Asked by what warrant he held, he produced in their midst an ancient and rusty sword and said, 'Look at this, my lords, this is my warrant! For my ancestors came with William the Bastard and conquered their lands with the sword, and by the sword I will defend them from anyone intending to seize them.'¹³

The earl addressed his audience directly, brandishing his warrant, a rusty old sword that is at once memory and threat, an artifact of the past and a sign of his power to overturn the order of the present. Yet Warrenne's argument is made in words, and an obvious but essential fact about these words is that they have the form of a first-person address, honorific but rude, to an audience using second-person imperatives. It is the speech that makes the old sword into a pointed link to a past deed, part of the violent conflict by which the present order came to be; more than a souvenir, it is an icon of his power to reactivate the conflict by which he won his present rights.

2. The Shared Pattern

In Isaiah and Psalms we find three highly concrete and pragmatically marked invocations of God's violent conquest of the universe. Each finds its occasion in an enemy's violent conquest of Israel during the speaker's present time. The texts also share a quite specific grammatical pattern:

12. Hence the modern legal term "deed"—not, in fact, a deed but a piece of paper. See M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 52.

13. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 36.

they begin with one or more participial epithets describing God, followed by one or more suffix-form verbs describing his deeds, and the divine subject is addressed with a string of second-person pronouns.

These texts, which I term “combat hymns,” also share a tightly delimited theme. In each of these, God’s existing right to the land being invaded, his pending obligation to reclaim that land by expelling the enemy, and his immediate power to defeat the enemy are invoked by presenting a kind of verbal artifact, the litany of the archaic deeds of God, brandished like Warrenne’s rusty sword. Each invocation also invokes God’s mighty *arm*, which tends increasingly to resemble a living talisman so that in the third poetic text, Isa 51, the text reads as if a partly independent female divine being is being addressed, a hypostasis of the violent power by which God’s sovereignty is won.

Our first text, Ps 74, is uttered like the others in the context of exile: the sovereignty of the Judean kingdom has been overthrown, and its territory is being invaded. Worse, and more shockingly, God himself seems to be being dispossessed from his land, which he acquired in primordial times along with Israel itself. The text addresses God with a rhetorical question and an imperative:

Remember the congregation you established¹⁴ of old.
You redeemed the tribe of your inheritance,
Mount Zion, the place where you came to dwell. (74:3)

Here *qnh*, usually “buy,” has an archaic creation resonance as in Prov 8, יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו, “The LORD acquired me as the first of his ways / the LORD made me as the first of his dominion [cf. Ugaritic *drkt*],” where קנה is parallel not to a verb of acquisition but to one of making, “the earliest of his ancient doings.”¹⁵

14. For an early attestation of *qny* as “establish” (the likely ancient basis of its later apparently incompatible meanings of “purchase” versus “create”) see KTU 3.9:1–3: “the Marzeah that *šmmn* established (*qny*).”

15. For over a thousand years, this verb was used in a wide spectrum of West Semitic languages to name the creator God: already preserved in fifteenth-century BCE Hittite as a foreign epithet for the Canaanite Ilqunirsa, “El, creator of the earth,” through the Iron Age Phoenician inscription from Karatepe referring to El-creator-of-earth to the late antique Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions where the epithet appears again. The archaic resonances outside of the Bible echo within it; when Abraham is

But the connection between “establishing” or “creating” a people and “redeeming” them (גאל) evokes a more explicit poetic account of God’s foundation and liberation of Israel, one that the Torah understands as the most foundational one. This is the Song of the Sea, Exod 15, which strategically breaks into the narrative of the exodus to commemorate God’s original redemption of his people at the Red Sea. The people themselves are said to take over the telling of the Israel’s redemption from the anonymous narrator, as first the men led by Moses, then the women led by Miriam, sing a hymn to the Lord and his right arm (Exod 15:6, 12, 16). Here, too, Israel is the “the people you redeemed” (עם־יו גאלת, 15:13) and “the people you established/ransomed” (עם־יו קנית, 15:16) to found them in a new land. The acquisition of a dwelling place by God, figured in Exod 15:17 as a mountain sanctuary that his hands established and here specified as Mount Zion, completes the parallel.¹⁶

Now the speaker alerts God that this very place, Mount Zion, where he came to dwell during the redemption of his people Israel, is being desecrated in an extravagant show: “Your enemies roar within your meeting place; they set their signs as signs—they set your sanctuary on fire!” This catastrophic display of violence overturns the center of the religious and political universe that God founded, and it also overturns a precedent: in the earliest independent Israelite prophet, Amos, the roar of the lion is already proverbial as a universally recognized sign at which all who hear should tremble, and thus as an analogue to God’s sovereign power over speech and meaning itself: “The lion roars, who does not fear? The LORD God speaks, who does not prophesy?” (אריה שאג מי לא ירא אדני יהוה דבר) (Amos 3:8) Now the enemy roars, sets up their signs as wonders, and no one prophesies.

We do not see *our* signs; there is no prophet any more,
and there is none among us who knows, “When?” (Ps 74:9)

The sense of present crisis is not confined to the content of the text: in fact the only way we know that it is a present crisis is through our interpretation of the text’s language, but the very sequence of verb forms here

blessed by Melchizedek, the priest of ancient Jerusalem, he invokes “El Elyon, creator of Heaven and earth” (Gen 14:22).

16. For a survey of attempts to identify a specific location behind this mountain, see Ayali-Darshan, “The Question.”

forces the question of how past connects to present in poetry; verbs such as “roars” or “do not see” appear in suffix forms, conventionally described as perfects, but the latter is paralleled with the verbless form, *אִין־עוֹד נִבִּיא*. In this psalm, as for example in Exod 15, the opposition between past and present is not marked through verb morphology. To understand the pragmatics of the language, it is crucial here to note that time is also not marked by “context”; that is, there are no explicit temporal cues in the text denoting that God’s acquisition of his people occurred long ago but that the enemy’s roaring is in the immediate present, no reference to today (הַיּוֹם) or now (עַתָּה).

As is standard with Biblical Hebrew poetry, the grammar of the text thus necessarily involves the reader: it works by both drawing on the audience’s knowledge of the collective memory of the past and by inducing the audience to interpret the speaker’s utterances. On a more fundamental linguistic level this process, known as implicature, which is crucial to both syntax and semantics, involves a set of assumptions derived not merely from the text but from necessarily interpreted readings of the text that the audience itself provides.¹⁷ God’s acquisition of his people and dwelling are known to be in the remote past; the enemy’s violation, which reverses this condition and predicates the crisis to which the speaker is urging God to respond, must occur in the present. The enemy’s violent acts are morphologically marked not as to time but as to state—they have been performed and will continue to be performed—until God arises to stop them. The move to a different sequence of verb forms occurs with a shift in speech genre, from lament to rhetorical questioning and hymn of praise:

Why do you turn back your hand,
restrain your right hand within your bosom?
O God, (you are) my king of old,
who-makes-victory within the land. (Ps 74:11–12)

The ongoing present of God’s withdrawn hand, hidden within his bosom, is opposed by stark contrast with the opening of the combat hymn referring to a time when God brought about victory within the land and his arm was not withdrawn but outstretched, a form we will see in each of our three texts. God is first addressed with an epithet, in the form of an

17. Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 97–166, esp. 125.

untensed participle, which emphasizes the permanent and inherent features of God—ones that God can activate at any moment should he choose to. Here we see the grammatical pattern of the combat hymn, moving from participial epithets to suffix-form verbs, addressing its subject with a string of second-person pronouns.¹⁸

The poetic speech can be summed up in the imperative the speaker directly addresses to God, the imperative “remember!” (זכר), an attempt to reactivate the connection between what is past (קדם), an archaic precedent (lines 2, 11, 12), and what is close (קרב), here and immediately present (lines 4, 11 [2x]).

You split [פוררת]¹⁹ Sea with your might,
shattered the heads of the dragons on the water.
It is you who crushed to pieces the heads of Leviathan,
who made him food for the people of the desert.
It is you who split open spring and wadi;
you dried up the perpetually flowing rivers.
Yours is day, even night is yours;
it is you who established luminary and sun.
It is you who set up every border of the land;
summer and fall, it is you who formed them. (Ps 74:13–17)

18. As noted by Hutton, “Isaiah 51:9–11,” 282 n. 46.

19. I translate following NRSV because the form is *poel*, similar to the *qal-hithpoel* sequence in Isa 24:19 (“the earth is torn asunder”), which the major lexica consider to be from the root פָּרַר II, rather than פָּרַר I “break” (thus BDB “split, cleave”; *HALOT*, as well as JPS, less plausibly, interpret פָּרַר II as referring to sudden motion, thus *HALOT* “stir, rouse,” JPS “drive back”). For this interpretation, see already KJV (“Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength”) and NRSV (“You divided the sea by your might”) My reading accepts, with the JPS translation, NRSV, BDB, *HALOT*, the separation of פָּרַר into two roots, one in *hiphil* and *hophal*, to be distinguished from a second in *poel*, *qal* and *hithpoel*. It is likely that פָּרַר II is a stem variant within Semitic of an underlying *P-R-weak root; on the broader issue, see Rainer Maria Voigt, *Die infirmen Verbaltypen des Arabischen und das Biradikalismus-Problem* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1988.) BDB argue for rendering this root “split” based on an Arabic form *farfara* “split,” but the pattern is broader; cf. modern Arabic *faraya* “cleave, divide,” *faraʾa* “split,” *farā* “split lengthwise, divide,” Akkadian *parāʾu* “divide.” It is possible to see both sets of attestations as reflecting a single root, against most modern translations and lexica, but at the risk of neglecting the grammatical pattern and lexicography, reflected in a comment on an earlier draft that the rendering as “split,” “follows Gunkel’s, [which] seems to have originated in Mesopotamian mythology rather than in Hebrew lexicography.” This would imply striking prescience on the part of the King James translators!

The conclusion resumes the imperatives of the beginning, as God is asked to “Look to the covenant” (74:20), “arise, “remember,” “do not forget.” These words constitute God’s warrant to the universe, a deed whose action was the slaying of the dragon and creation of the world and whose obligations are laid down in the covenant. The speaker implicitly claims the ability to reactivate God’s sovereignty by arousing his memory: remember, arise, remember, do not forget. God’s defeat of the serpent in primordial time is what gives him the right to the world, but the connections between combat and creation run deeper; in fact, each one is iconic of the other.

Verbs such as *פרר*, *מחץ*, and *בקע* are often treated as if they are all synonyms of “smite,” all blurring into a uniform story. However, both the poetics of the psalm and the way it draws on its parallel in biblical history, the exodus event, are crucially dependent on the nuances of these verbs: in this text God’s *division* of the universe is the key that allows him to order it: God not only splits (*פרר*) the sea but cuts open (*בקע*) the springs and dries out the flowing rivers; each sign of his sovereignty is the result of his binary division of both space, through these splits, and time, by setting up the sun and luminaries; day and night are the Lord’s because he divided them.

The distinctiveness of this view can be made clear by looking at the combat myth’s ancient Near Eastern cognates: in fact, what we have here is not an archaic myth at all but an innovation shared between biblical and Neo-Assyrian sources. In 1895, the only example Gunkel had to hand was the newly discovered *Enuma Elish*, which he imagined to be the archaic ancestor of the biblical motif.²⁰ In this text, Marduk, who like the Lord of Israel is both a storm god and a sovereign high god, defeats Tiamat and forms the universe by splitting her corpse.

Yet not only are there no other ancient Semitic combat myths in which a storm god splits a dragon—*Enuma Elish* is the only one—but far from being an archaic ancestor, the earliest known manuscripts of *Enuma Elish* come from early Neo-Assyrian archaeological assemblages (850 BCE or later) and thus share a broad first-millennium context with Second Isaiah and these psalms.²¹ While there are arguments for an earlier date, the only

20. The latest edition of which by Heinrich Zimmern was provided as an appendix to Gunkel’s book.

21. For an important parallel argument that the Mesopotamian and biblical examples of the myth cluster together as a first-millennium phenomenon, against a different pattern found in second-millennium instances, see Ayali-Darshan, “Other

attested earlier evidence is quite interesting in this regard: the Mari letter from the eighteenth century BCE in which the storm god Hadad says he has granted the king “the weapons with which he did battle with Tiamat,” *kakkê ša itti tēmtim amtahsu*, in the Gt with reciprocal force.²² In other words, in this Old Babylonian text not only does Hadad make no claim to have split Tiamat, but he is not necessarily even claiming to have permanently defeated her.²³

This comparison can be made more pointed by asking whether these weapons were swords or arrows or, as one might expect of a storm god, blunt instruments: maces or cudgels such as those that Baal wields. It is significant to note here that in Ugaritic the only “splitting” of a divine

Version.” Complete data for the dating and findspots of all known manuscripts are given in Gösta Gabriel, *Enūma eliš – Weg zu einer globalen Weltordnung: Pragmatik, Struktur und Semantik des babylonischen “Lieds auf Marduk,” Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 12* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 65–70, with comprehensive bibliography and archaeological dates for the earliest manuscripts, from Assur and Kalhu, on 65. The most widely discussed suggestion for the text’s date of creation is the late twelfth century BCE, first made by W. G. Lambert, “The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I: A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T. J. Meek*, ed. W. S. McCullough (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 3–13. However, Lambert emphasizes that there is no physical evidence for a second-millennium date: “There is only a small group of fragments from Assur which certainly antedate Late Assyrian times, and these are in a script which can be put beyond all doubt between the Late Assyrian texts and those from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1100 b.c.). This gives a mean of c. 900” (Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 16 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013], 442). For a thorough refutation of the likelihood of the earlier, Kassite dating offered by Walter Sommerfeld (*Der Aufstieg Marduks: Die Stellung Marduks in der babylonischen Religion des zweiten Jahrtausends v. Chr.* [Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1982]), see Lambert, “Studies in Marduk,” *BSOAS* 47 (1984): 1–9. For a suggestion as to a later date, written as a defensive assertion of greatness by a waning Babylon see Tzvi Abusch, “Marduk,” *DDD*, 547–48. On the thinking behind Enuma Elish’s composition, see Andrea Seri “Borrowings to Create Anew: Intertextuality in the Babylonian Poem of ‘Creation’ (Enūma Eliš),” *JAOS* 134 (2014): 89–106, with bibliography.

22. J. M. Durand, “Le mythe du combat entre le dieu de l’Orage et la Mer en Mésopotamie,” *MARI* 7 (1993): 41–61, A. 1968 2’-3’; reading the verb as perfect is morphologically possible but less idiomatic (*pan/āt*, rather than *itti, tēmtim* would likely be expected).

23. On the theme of muzzling, rather than killing, the sea-dragon, see *KTU* 1.3 III 38–46: “Did I not place a bit in the mouth of Tannin and harness him?”; see also Dennis Pardee, “Will the Dragon Never Be Muzzled?” *UF* 16 (1984): 254.

enemy is done not by Baal but by his tougher, sword-wielding sister Anat, who serves as Baal's rescuer from Death.²⁴ In *KTU* 1.6 II 32 her protective feelings for her brother, "like the heart of a cow for her calf," lead her to split Motu with a sword, using the verb *bqʿ*, to cut (*// KTU* 1.6 V), allowing Baal to escape the underworld and return to life.

If the dragon-slaying god does not, in general, split the sea, then the specific imagery of *Enuma Elish* and the Hebrew Bible represent shared innovations, dating to the Late Bronze Age at the earliest, and not an archaic pan-Near Eastern combat myth. Like midrash and inner-biblical interpretation that evokes in order to transform, the Bronze Age myth of the storm god is invoked in a new way in the Iron Age—but why?

Here it is worth noting that another shared feature of *Enuma Elish* with the Bible—that the god who slays the dragon is not merely a storm god but a storm god who has ascended to cosmic sovereignty by gaining the position of high god (see Ps 82)—should not be seen in isolation from his specific mode of dragon-slaying and creation by cutting.

Marduk's dismemberment of Tiamat is part of a broader ancient Mesopotamian discourse in which the sovereign function—for example, the juridical and divinatory role of the sun god Shamash to determine and reveal fate—is figured as his cutting at the horizon, the juncture of heaven and earth.²⁵ That this is an early Mesopotamian way of thinking about creation is clear from the vocabulary of creation in Sumerian, where *bad* "separate" is used at the beginning of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld to describe the differentiation of earth and heaven. More broadly, the Akkadian lexicon of decision making, as the Hebrew, draws frequently on verbs that span the semantic range between cutting, dividing, and deciding (e.g., *parāsu*), so that the association between dividing a

24. Contra Mark S. Smith, who argues for the fusion of Anat and Baal imagery after the Late Bronze Age in *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed., Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 106–7. Hutton argues that "there remained throughout the monarchic period recognition in some circles of the origination of divine warrior imagery as a predication of both Baal and Anat" ("Isaiah 51:9–11," 295 n. 94); cf. Patrick D. Miller Jr., "The Absence of the Goddess in Israelite Religion," *HAR* 10 (1987): 239–48; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

25. For this conception, see Christopher Woods, "At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia," *JANER* 9 (2009): 183–239.

cosmic opponent in two and gaining sovereignty would be intuitive, if not overdetermined.

What these facts suggest is that, rather than a unitary myth of immortal age, the combat myth was rethought in the Late Bronze or Early Iron Age together with an originally separate way of thinking and talking. This *imaginaire* of cutting and determining infused the dragon-slaying myth, a narrative of how kingship was won, with the cosmic power of creation and judgment held by the high god.

The language of cutting and enthronement are configured together in our next example, Ps 89. Here the speaker draws attention to his act of singing, declaring that he wishes to sing forever (לדר ודר and עולם) of the steadfast loyalty of God. He immediately moves to ventriloquize God in what many have seen as an old enthronement ritual. Indeed, the entire psalm may be taken as a poetic reflex of the more prosaic oracle in 2 Sam 7, in which God promises David eternal kingship.²⁶

I cut a covenant with my firstborn;
I make an oath to David my servant,
"For all eternity I will establish your line,
and I will set up your throne in every generation." (Ps 89:4–5)

The parallel between God's legal action and the singer's pragmatic language invoking it is drawn temporally in לדר ודר and עולם, which converge in the eternal covenant. Much more explicitly than in Ps 74, the Lord's supremacy as a high god is made clear with the command for other divine beings to praise him

Let the heavens praise your wonder, O LORD,
indeed, your faithfulness in the assembly of the Holy Ones.
For who in the skies can compare to the LORD,
resemble the LORD among the divine beings?
A god feared in the council of the Holy Ones,
greater and more terrible than those around him
Lord, God of hosts, who is strong like you, Yah?
Your faithfulness surrounds you. (Ps 89:6–9)

26. Cf. Otto Eissfeldt, "The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1–5," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962) 196–207, esp. 199–200.

The combat hymn begins, as in Ps 74, with a participial epithet with incantatory force:

You rule majestically over the sea;²⁷
 when his waves come up you still them.
 You made Rahab crumple like a corpse pierced through,
 scattered your foe with the furious might of your arm.
 Yours is heaven, also yours is earth;
 the world and what fills it—you founded them.
 North and south, you created them;
 Tabor and Hermon rejoice in your name.
 Yours is an arm with might;
 your hand prevails; your right arm is raised.²⁸ (89:10–14)

The connection between piercing and creating the universe here appears in another form; again God's control of totality is expressed in binary oppositions, but again this binarism is not a mere figure of speech but understood as an inherent structure of the universe and a key to its origins. It was the medieval poet Abraham Ibn Ezra who pointed out that the word for create, used here in line 13, "North and south, you created them," cannot mean to create from nothing. In a series of bold arguments he made the case that *ברא* inherently means to split, divide, and thereby determine; this is why, he says, borders are cut.²⁹ Remarkably, this perception is not the result of some archaic survival in Jewish tradition, the subterranean undercurrent of ancient myth in midrash that scholars like Fishbane have detailed, but rather a strictly philological argument drawn from an iconoclastic but accurate perception of the Hebrew's semantics.

27. Cf. the parallel action of Isa 11–12, involving drying up the Euphrates with a mighty wind, into seven wadis, so that the righteous can pass over it, where the reference in Isa 12:5 is to drying up seven branches, serpentlike "heads" of the sea and setting up a new Davidic king.

28. Cf. the crux in Ps 74:3, echoes of Exod 14:8; Num 33:3

29. The motifs of sovereignty are so dense here as to make it almost a reflex in poetic language of the motifs of 2 Sam 7, one an oracle as narrated and the other an oracle as performed and liturgically remembered. The event of the divine covenant-cutting and God's dialogue with the king in liturgy appears in the narrative of 2 Samuel into a mere oracular report, filtered through dreams: the king does not get to talk to God in 2 Samuel, while in Ps 89 he does a duet with him. The king's participation in a dialogue with God implies that the psalm represents and remembers a monarchical stream that the narrative in Samuel does not.

Yet here, too, there is something beyond the bounds of monotheistic piety; Ibn Ezra's last comment is, "the perceptive will understand."

There is clearly something more with our last example, God's startling hymn to his own arm expressed in Second Isaiah. If the mythic figure of God's raised arm is essential to the precedent-setting victory in Ps 89, in our last combat hymn, that of Isa 51, this arm will assume a new prominence, not merely personified, it seems, but somehow a person.³⁰

Arise, arise, clothe yourself in might, Arm of the Lord!
 Arise as in days of old, as in ages past!
 Are you not she who cuts Rahab, who pierces Tannin?
 Are you not she who dries up Sea, the waters of the great Deep,
 who made the depths of Sea a path for the redeemed to cross?
 Then the freed ones³¹ return and come to Zion in joy. (Isa 51:9–11a)

Grammatically, here there is the least marking of tense, mood, or aspect of all three hymns: all the epithets are participial except the last. The translation here as "are you not she" is jarring, but it faithfully reflects the Hebrew; were this morphological pattern of feminine pronouns and participles to occur on its own, it would be easily explicable as a side effect of the standard Semitic grammatical gender. But Isa 51's literary context is the desecration of God's land, figured as an address to a female victim. In fact, Isa 51:9–11 is the first of a sequence of three strongly parallel passages in which God addresses a series of three feminine figures with double imperatives³² of the sort dear to Deutero-Isaiah; two of them are utterly passive, stunned by the Lord's intoxicating cup or violated by the feet of strangers. One is quite different, distinguished not least by the fact that she is at once part of God's own body and a supremely deadly weapon.

Indeed, the first epithet with which God's arm is invoked makes this point: the form *המחצבת* finds a striking parallel in the combat of Anat. In

30. On the notion of hypostasis within Judean and Egyptian Jewish religion, see P. Kyle McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 137–55.

31. 1QIsa^a appears to be midrashic in this passage, reading "dispersed" here, as well as harmonizing v. 9 with Job 26:12, which however adds further complexity to the *agon* theme, since there it is God's *tebunah* that helped him smash Rahab!

32. Cf. Isa 40:1; 62:10 and note that the subject of these double imperatives is always the people, or *bat Zion* as metonym.

the word's one appearance in Ugaritic literature, it appears in the reflexive during one of her battles; the poetics of a violent divine being seems to be continued from earlier Canaanite traditions.³³

The relationship between gender and genre that this passage evokes might thus be characterized by evoking a once-productive and now-intolerable tension between male and female mythic violence. Note that every ancient combat myth in which a god cuts an enemy, whether in *Enuma Elish* or *Baal*, has involved two genders—and note that this gendered combat is now resolved, at the most impassioned and mythic pitch of biblical poetry, by incorporating the offending goddess literally into God's body. For to judge by literary context alone, this combat hymn is being spoken by God himself, addressed to his own hypostatized arm, a being whose divinity and supportive power—indeed, the power to make God king—is remembered in this exilic text. A history of gender within God could be written starting here, moving onward to the Jewish military colony in Egypt at Elephantine, where this violent Canaanite goddess is further incorporated, this time into God's name, as a contract reports an oath in the fifth century that is sworn in the name of Anat-Yahu, one of a panoply of manifestations of the God of Israel that includes the god Bet-El, the divine temple, and Herem-Bet-El, the divinized courtyard of God's temple.

3. Conclusion

What picture emerges from these three hymns in their larger literary context? How does biblical poetics work to both contain and invoke these deeds? It is helpful to recall the narrated creation account of Gen 1:1–2:4a: as opposed to each of our three combat hymns, the narrator of this creation is not deictically present; he makes no invocations and speaks in neither the first- nor second-person; he is, in fact, a nonperson. The

33. *KTU* 1.3 III 38. It is here that a minor text-critical issue, the presence of a variant form מַחֲצֵת or the like in 1QIsa^a becomes germane. Scholars have suggested emending away the form of חֲצַב “hack in two” as an anomalous *hiphil* and reading instead with the Great Isaiah scroll “smite.” Yet aside from the issue of the nature of the scroll as a textual witness—as Edward Y. Kutscher, its first great linguistic analyst, already pointed out—it is frequently popularizing, even midrashic, and here seems to be harmonizing with Job 26:12. See Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Great Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959).

actions of Gen 1 are narrated in *wayyiqtol* forms, the accomplished past of history and narrative.

But if the narrator is silent, it is God's turn to speak; every single utterance of God's is dominated by a pragmatically marked verb form. This stands in stark contrast to the view of human language that the Priestly source of Gen 1:1–2:4 expounds. The Priestly view of ritual involves a pragmatics of almost complete silence: no prayers, songs, or utterances are ever prescribed in ritual, with a few narrowly delimited exceptions. Effective speech belongs to God alone, and, just as our combat hymns provide charters for God's violent overthrow of an older order and his assertion of sovereignty in this world, so the Priestly creation story provides a charter for an order that was set up at the beginning of time, an order that cannot be challenged because it is inherent to a continuous and regular cosmic time rather than a punctual series of crises.

Thus the poetry of creation through combat is inherently connected to a monarchic model of political sovereignty in this world: God has won the right to the world by main force; he opened it up to life and time by cutting it in two. The deixis of the poems points to the speaker and the speaker's present moment, directly calling God out to erase the gap between past order and present chaos. The pathos of these poems comes from this very rhetoric, how they conjure an ancient sovereignty to confront a new historical situation. They are no longer celebrations of an order established by violence but rather urgent pleas to restore order through violence, sundering the present world to make it whole again, what the anarchist Bakunin referred to as "creative destruction."

The Priestly creation account silences these pragmatics. It finds no room for destruction, or sovereignty, in the present, to which it never explicitly refers. The Priestly source argues that the most important form of creativity happened at the beginning of time, and so insists that it does not matter what time the present speaker may be speaking. Divine and human time are not calibrated by poets but by calendars. If our poetic combat myths involved a speaker speaking of God deciding matters by cutting, the Priestly creation narrative puts all the pragmatics in the mouth of God, who decides by simply speaking, once and for all.

The Earl of Warrenne's argument was never entered into the king's rolls, and, in fact, its status as history was considered uncertain for centuries. While it is not my purpose today to engage the definition of "myth"—as Wendy Doniger says, we will only stop arguing about it when we stop caring about it—it is worthwhile to refer here to two polar opposites in

thinking about myth. The first is the anthropologist Edmund Leach's, of myth as "a designation of reality"; the second is the late Greek and traditional European one of myth as "an untrue story." In the history of English law, our story of the Earl of Warrenne serves as a neat example of the transition from one to the other: in 1913 the line between myth and history was neatly cut when the editors removed it from Bishop Stubbs's manual of English charters, known as "the bible of historians."

Our Bible, on the other hand, has interwoven its invocations of mythic sovereignty so tightly into its history that they forever remain suspended *in potentio*. The dividing line between archaic poetry and politics is then only crossed in apocalypses, when the Arm of the Lord returns to overthrow the order of the world.

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Turning Inward: Addressing the *Nefesh* in Biblical Poetry

George Savran

1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects of biblical poetry is its capacity for granting the reader access to inner states—to feelings of guilt, of remorse, of anxiety—emotions that are usually unavailable to the reader of biblical prose. Such access to emotional states can be found in much of biblical poetry, but it is particularly noticeable in the book of Psalms. In contrast with those parts of the Bible where divine discourse to the human community is dominant, the psalms most often reflect the opposite dynamic, in which a human speaking voice addresses God. At times the psalmist hints at his internal situation by using external reality to reflect an internal state. Thus, bodily debilities, the actions of enemies or detractors, and the language of victory or defeat may be used to describe despair, happiness, blessing, even curse.¹ My interest, however, lies in those poetic moments when the speaking voice turns inward and addresses its own self, whether by calling upon that self to sing or to praise God or to describe an appeal to God in dialogical form.

In his many studies of the language of the book of Job (and elsewhere), Ed Greenstein has added greatly to our appreciation of the subtleties of biblical poetry. I offer this essay as a small contribution to our understanding of different aspects of voice in biblical poetry.

1. See the discussion of this language in Amy C. Cottrill, *Language, Power and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 29–57. See also Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: A Study of Dialogic Voice in the Lament Psalms* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), as well as the response by D. W. Suderman, “From Dialogic Tension to Social Address: Reconsidering Mandolfo’s Proposed Didactic Voice in Lament Psalms,” *JHS* 17 (2017), doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2017.v17.a10.

Most often the object of this address is that entity called the *nefesh*, often translated as “soul,” even though the term has a variety of different meanings.² As we know, *nefesh* can mean “throat,” “neck,” “desire,” “life,” and “person,” in addition to the various understandings of the term “soul.”³ The expression “Bless the LORD, O my *nefesh*” (Pss 103:1, 22; 104:1, 35) is a reflection of this inward turn in the most positive sense, where the term *nefesh* indicates the whole person, including the physical body. The psalmist engages his entire being in this moment of praise, the address to the *nefesh* indicating the fullest expression of self, as in the parallelism in Ps 103:1: “Bless the LORD, O my *nefesh* // all my being, his holy name.” We find the same sort of address in Ps 146:1: “Praise the LORD, O my *nefesh*,” where the emphasis is on the living quality of the *nefesh*.⁴ In these cases, as in many others, the *nefesh* is not an entity apart from the speaking voice but a deeper or fuller representation of the entire self.

But occasionally the poet describes the *nefesh* in a different manner, referring to an inner aspect of the self apart from the speaking voice. In these texts this part of the self appears to be in conflict with the perspective of the speaking voice of the poet. The psalmist in Ps 131 maintains that he has quieted and calmed his *nefesh* as an indication of his self-control.⁵ On the surface all seems peaceful, but the insistent language of denial in verse 1 suggests an inner struggle. The *nefesh* is in a state of controlled desire: “Like a nursed child with its mother / like a weaned child is my *nefesh*

2. Other forms of self-address include לְבִי (Jer 4:19; Lam 3:21), רוּחִי (Ps 77:7), and כְּבוֹדִי (Ps 57:9).

3. On the range of meanings of *nefesh*, see the fuller discussion by Horst Seebass, “נֶפֶשׁ,” *TDOT* 9:497–519; Bernd Janowski, “Die lebendige ‘næpæš’: Das Alte Testament und die Frage nach der ‘Seele,’” in *Biblical Lexicology: Hebrew and Greek; Semantics, Exegesis, Translation*, ed. E. Bons, J. Joosten, and R. Hunziker-Rodewald (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 131–73. The recent study by Richard C. Steiner (*Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East*, ANEM 11 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015]) focuses primarily on the question of an external soul, but see pp. 79–80.

4. In a similar fashion, the psalmist in Ps 57:9 rouses himself to praise by addressing כְּבוֹדִי, here understood as “my heart” or, with emendation to *kebedi*, “my liver” as metonymy for “my innermost being” (Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100*, AB 17 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday: 1968], 54). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

5. Most commentators see this as a male voice, but see Melody D. Knowles, “A Woman at Prayer: A Critical Note on Psalm 131:2b,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 385.

within me.” Using the image of the recently weaned child who still wants to nurse at its mother’s breast, the *nefesh* is troubled by unfulfilled desires that the psalmist has struggled to control. Here the *nefesh* appears to be an aspect of the self with autonomous desires that can be tamed but cannot be entirely extinguished.⁶ A similar idea is found in Ps 94:19: “When I am filled with cares, your consolations cheer my *nefesh*.” The use of the unusual word שרעפי indicates that the psalmist is referring to disturbing inner thoughts as in Ps 139:21.⁷

In contrast to the above, where the psalmist talks about the *nefesh* in the third-person, sometimes the speaker addresses the *nefesh* directly. The poet rarely gives us direct access to these inner thoughts, but in certain cases we can reconstruct them from clues within the psalm. In Ps 116:7, the psalmist implores: “Return, my *nefesh*, to your rest, for the LORD has requited you.” Up to this point in the psalm we have not heard about the distress of the *nefesh*. We learn about the nature of this inner conflict only obliquely in verses 10–11: “Out of great suffering I spoke rashly and said, ‘All humans are false.’” This quote describes the sense of despair within the *nefesh* that the psalmist seeks to hearten in verse 7. Again in Ps 62:6 the *nefesh* is addressed directly: “Truly, wait for God, O my *nefesh*”; however, in contrast to the previous example, the discomfort of the *nefesh* is not a thing of the past. While the psalmist has declared in verse 2, “Truly my *nefesh* waits quietly for God,” affirming that God is his salvation, in verse 6 the poet reformulates this in the imperative, saying דומי, “wait,” implying that the *nefesh* still needs to be quieted. Where the psalmist seemed certain of salvation in verse 2, he describes God with less confidence in verse 6 as תקותי, “my hope.” The verses of the psalm that describe the dangers that beset the psalmist in the present reinforce the sense that the troubles of the *nefesh* are very much present.⁸

In a few cases the *nefesh* is addressed directly and given its own voice. In these texts the poet gives voice to an actual dialogue, reflecting the speaker’s need to converse within himself about an ongoing dilemma that he is facing. The clearest example of this is the triple repetition of such

6. Cf. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 451.

7. Compare שרעפם in Job 4:13; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 111.

8. The term רבה is missing from the refrain in 62:6, suggesting that the psalmist’s confidence here is not as great as in vv. 2–5.

an address in Pss 42–43: “Why so disturbed, my *nefesh*, why disquieted within me? ... Have hope in God. ... I will yet praise the saving presence of my God” (Ps 42:6, 12; 43:5). We see this again in a slightly different form in Ps 77:7: “I recall at night their jibes at me; I commune with myself; my spirit inquires.” Likewise, in Lam 3:20 there is a dialogue between the complaint of the *nefesh* and the poet’s attempt to justify the afflictions visited upon Jerusalem: “Whenever my *nefesh* recalled them [my troubles] it protested to me.”⁹ In all three texts there is a distinct indication that the poet is struggling internally with an issue that makes it impossible to address God with a unified voice.¹⁰

I would like to pose two questions about this unusual occurrence. First, under what emotional or physical circumstances does the poet make reference to a divided self or indicate that there is an internal argument going on? Insofar as this phenomenon is largely associated with the poetry of lament, something untoward has occurred in the relationship between the poet and God that is reflected in a dislocation of the speaking voice. This is a deeply personal conceit; all the cases that display the *nefesh* in this way refer to נַפְשִׁי, “my *nefesh*.” This is significant in that it shows the speaking voice addressing an aspect of his own self intimately—never “your *nefesh*” or “his *nefesh*.” The disruption of the unity of the self is a reflection of the crisis in the relationship between the poet and the divine; it is this sense of alienation from the divine that engenders a split in the poet’s voice.

The second question (or set of questions) has more of a literary orientation: Poetically speaking, what occasions the appearance of this dual voice? Is there some unique poetic factor that signals the entrance of the second voice, and how does the poet make use of it? How does the idea of a divided voice play itself out in the poem as a whole? To what extent is the conflict reflected in the divided voice resolved in the poem, and to what degree does the tension remain between the two voices? As we will see, each text that contains an internal divided voice will have its own set of responses to these queries.

9. See the discussion of this translation below.

10. James Kugel refers to the soul here as a “double agent”: “the soul ... was apparently not always considered to be entirely one’s own possession, or, consequently, completely under one’s control” (*Great Poems of the Bible* [New York: Free Press, 1999], 47).

2. Psalms 42–43

The fullest expression of this split voice is found in Pss 42–43. The psalm is characterized by a strident dissonance between the psalmist's wishes and his reality, contrasting memories of the past with his present situation. This is articulated in a continuous movement back and forth between statements of anguish and expressions of hope. Despair is noted in 42:2–4, 7–8, 10–11, and 43:5, while optimism is expressed in 42:5–6, 9, 12, and 43:2–4. In 42:2–3 the psalmist's *nefesh* thirsts for God, yearning to “see the presence of God,” that is, to be present at a pilgrimage festival.¹¹ The psalmist's physical distance from the longed-for sanctuary is compounded by his complaint of God's absence: “They say to me all day long ‘Where is your God?’” (Ps 42:4). The *nefesh* thus far might be taken to be the self in its entirety, as in other psalms where the *nefesh* is a stand-in for the “I” of the poet. Indeed, most readings of the psalm see the alternation between hope and despair as reflecting the fluctuating state of mind of the psalmist. I agree with this but would take it a step further. Given the prominent place of the *nefesh* in the subsequent verses and the fact that the psalmist addresses the *nefesh* directly in verse 6, we would do better to understand certain of these expressions of despair as reflecting the voice of the *nefesh* itself, expressing its *own* deep desires and its intense despondency. Whereas 42:3a reports the voice of the poet describing the *nefesh* (“My *nefesh* thirsts for God, the living God”), in 42:3b–4 the poet gives voice to the *nefesh* as it holds forth verbally: “When will I come and see the presence of God?”¹² That the psalmist would portray the *nefesh* as having its own voice is in keeping with the fact that 42:6 attributes an articulate voice to the *nefesh* (מה תשתוחח נפשי)¹³ as well as oral expression (ותהמי עלי).

11. Cf. Exod 34:23; Deut 16:16; Shmuel Ahituv, “The Countenance of God” [Hebrew], in *Tehillah LeMoshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. M. Cogan, B. Eichler, and J. Tigay (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 3*–13*.

12. On the means of introducing of direct speech in biblical poetry, see Edward L. Greenstein, “The Extent of Job's First Speech” [Hebrew], in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, ed. S. Vargon et al (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2005), 7:251–53.

13. My thanks to Ed Greenstein for directing me to the reading of Moshe Held (“Pits and Pitfalls in Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew,” *JANESCU* 5 [1973]: 177), who parses the verb not from šwḥ or šḥḥ but rather from śyḥ “to complain.” Greenstein explains the MT by suggesting that “the /ś/ must have turned to [š] preceding /t/.” (“On a New Grammar of Ugaritic,” *IOS* 18 [1988]: 413).

The verb *המה* is translated variously as “sigh” (Dahood), “moan” (Alter) “disturbed” (NIV), or “disquieted” (KJV, NJPS), but it designates more of a roaring sound in Isa 17:12 and is suggestive of vocal utterance in 1 Kgs 1:41 and Ruth 1:19. In its grievance in 42:3b–4 the *nefesh* longs for the divine presence at the temple, describing its estrangement from God in both a physical and spiritual sense.

The voice changes again in 42:5 as the poet addresses his *nefesh* as an autonomous entity.¹⁴ I read *אשפכה עלי נפשי*, “I pour out [my thoughts] to my *nefesh*,” with the term *שיחי* understood elliptically.¹⁵ The psalmist tries to calm the distraught *nefesh* with the recollection of pilgrimages past. The phrase “These I do recall” (*אלה אזכרה*) does not refer back to the lament of 42:3–4 but introduces the positive memories that follow in 42:5bc. It makes little sense to translate “I pour out my soul” in the sense of lament (Job 30:16; Lam 2:12) when the content of this outpouring in 42:5bc is a positive memory. In 42:6 the psalmist concludes his speech to the *nefesh* with a plea to “hope in God, for I will yet praise the saving presence of my God.”¹⁶ Thus the first section of the psalm proceeds from complaint in the voice of the psalmist in 42:2–3a, to an intensification of his grievance by the *nefesh* in 42:3b–4 and concludes with an attempt by the voice of the psalmist to assuage that lamentation in 42:5–6.

But in the next section the *nefesh* refuses to be comforted, and in verse 7 the poet is overwhelmed by the lamentation of the *nefesh*. I understand the phrase *נפשי תשתוחח עלי* as “my *nefesh* complains to me.” The verb is often translated “cast down” (RSV) or “deeply disturbed” (NJPS), but the content of 42:7b–8 is verbal protest against God.¹⁷ The *nefesh* goes

14. *Nefesh* is found with the verb *שפך* in the *hithpael* in Lam 2:12 and Job 30:16 in the sense of being close to death, which is not the case here. See David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37*, WBC 18A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1006. In Ps 42:5a, *nefesh* is the indirect object; the direct object is understood to be the psalmist’s positive memories in 42:5bc.

15. Cf. Pss 102:1; 142:3.

16. Against the MT I read all three refrains (42:6, 12; 43:5) identically. Moreover, MT *ישועת פני ואלהי פני* should be read *ישועת פני אלהי פני*, “the saving presence of my God,” where the *waw* on *פני* is dittography of the previous *yod*. The logic inherent in the emendation is the psalmist’s attempt to answer the longing of the *nefesh* for “the face of God” in 42:3 by promising the salvific presence of the divine.

17. See above n. 13. If the root of the verb is *שחה* or *שחח*, meaning “bent over” (HALOT), the preposition *על* is an odd fit, for it is difficult to imagine the *nefesh* recumbent over the psalmist. Equally unconvincing is the suggestion in HALOT,

on to describe its plight, its sense of exile, and, most significantly, God's role in all this. This speech of the *nefesh* includes 42:7b–8 (and possibly 42:10–11 as well), repeating the claims of distance and abuse that we saw earlier.¹⁸ The use of the verb זכר in verse 7 is a direct rebuke to the poet's invocation of memory in verse 5. Where the psalmist recalled past pilgrimages (אלה אזכרה) in an attempt to give hope in the present, the *nefesh* now “recalls” God (על כן אזכרך) as part of the cause of its present travail.¹⁹ With the phrase “All *your* breakers and waves have broken over me” (כל משבריד וגליך עלי עברו), the *nefesh* places the blame for this difficult situation directly on God. God is more than otiose here, as this demonstration of divine power is seen as destructive; the water longed for in 42:2–3 becomes a symbol of God's mistreatment of the *nefesh* in 42:8.²⁰

If the need to dramatize the tension between the poet and the *nefesh* is the literary occasion for this divided speech, the theological impetus for the dislocation of the *nefesh* is a perceived offense by God against the psalmist. Instead of salvation, the psalmist suffers from the power of the divine as the deeps wash over him. How, the *nefesh* asks, can the God who gives sustenance and protection also be a God who is both absent and punitive? The psalm reflects this dilemma by splitting the voice of the psalmist. On the one hand, the voice I have identified as the psalmist maintains its hope in God by means of memory, by its faith, and perhaps even by prayer in 42:9. The *nefesh* embodies the other part of the poet's

“appearing to have dissolved away,” from a root שיח meaning “to dissolve.” NJPS solves the problem by translating “my soul is downcast” and ignoring עלי. NIV, RSV, and KJV take עלי as “within me,” e.g., “My soul is downcast within me.” Dahood is on the right track with the idea of a dialogue here (*Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 257), citing comparable passages in which the *nefesh* is addressed (Pss 62:2; 103:1; 116:7; 142:4; 143:4) and mentioning the similarity to the Egyptian wisdom text “Dialogue between a Man and his Soul.” On this text, see Jan Assmann, “A Dialogue between Self and Soul: Papyrus Berlin 3024,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, and G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 384–403.

18. The positive sentiment of 42:9 disrupts the complaint of 42:7–8 and 10–11. This verse might be read as the positive interjection of the psalmist to the *nefesh*, followed by the negative response of the *nefesh* in 42:10–11. The psalmist speaks encouragingly of a divine song and of a daily experience of divine grace, but the *nefesh* sees that God has forsaken it and hears only the voice of those who mock him all day long.

19. The verb אזכרך should be understood in the sense of “think of” or “keep in mind”; cf. Deut 9:27; Jer 3:16

20. Luis Alonso-Schökel, “The Poetic Structure of Psalms 42–43,” *JSOT* 1 (1979): 7.

identity, that aspect of the self that refuses to be comforted and remains at odds with the first voice throughout the psalm. The tension between divine promise and human suffering is hardly unique to our psalm, but more often the poet tends to complain that God stands apart and allows his suffering or even that suffering is the result of divine punishment.²¹ In this case the poet confronts the dilemma of a God who appears to be two-faced by resorting to a double-voiced expression of the self.

I am hesitant to reconstruct further dialogue in the psalm beyond this point.²² My intent here is not to uncover actual speaking voices in the performance of the psalm but rather to understand the change in voice as indicative of a more complex idea of the self in biblical poetry. A divided self is usually portrayed negatively in the psalms as a source of lying, such as the person in Ps 12:3 who speaks “with two hearts/minds,” or again in 119:113: “I hate men of divided heart, / but I love your teaching.” Single-mindedness of purpose is frequently seen as an ideal in the Psalms; here, however, the divided self is not condemned but used to reflect upon a dilemma that the poet wishes to address. The recurrence of the refrain in 42:12 and 43:5 bears this out, attesting to the unwillingness of the *nefesh* to be placated.²³ Most commentators see a gradual change in the voice of the psalmist as the psalm progresses, becoming less confronting and more hopeful (particularly in 43:1–4), but this does not address the continued return of the refrain admonishing the *nefesh*. The disturbance of the *nefesh* is not easily overcome, if at all. The refrain reminds us of this dislocation, despite the more positive tone of 43:1–4. The divided voice emerges at the

21. The theme of divine punishment with no explicit mention of sin on the part of the sufferer can also be found in Ps 89:39–46, where the speaker accuses God of breaking his promise and mistreating the Davidic king. Psalms 44 and 88 make similar mention of divine affliction with no allusion to Israel’s sin.

22. As mentioned above, the tone of 42:9 seems out of place in the context of the complaints voiced in 42:7–8 and 10–11. The verse may be another attempt by the psalmist to calm his *nefesh* in keeping with the reading advanced here, although these words seem rather like a prayer addressed to God (תפילה לאל חי). In light of this, the issue of the voice in 42:9 remains unresolved, as is the question of the relationship the voice in 43:1–5 to the rest of the psalm. The *nefesh* may be partially comforted in 43:1–4 insofar as the tone of the psalmist is less histrionic in its request for divine intervention and accompaniment to the temple. However, 43:5 seems to indicate that the *nefesh* is not fully calmed.

23. This is somewhat unusual; in other refrain psalms the refrain tends to have a positive tone; see Pss 57:6, 12; 99:5, 9.

beginning of the psalm, and, though it gradually becomes more subdued, the refrain indicates that it has not gone away. The psalm ends without a full resolution of the problem.

3. Psalm 77

A second example of this divided voice can be seen in Ps 77, the first half of which is a lament and the second part a recital of the great deeds of God as redeemer. In the lament section (vv. 2–11) we find a situation similar to Ps 42: the psalmist is deeply troubled and cries out that his *nefesh* refuses to be comforted. As in Ps 42, the complaint in 77:4 is accompanied by the verb *המה* (“groaning”) as well the verb *אשיחה* to express complaint.²⁴ Once again memory is invoked (*זכר*), but in contrast to Ps 42, the psalmist’s distress is manifested in physical debility: weakness, fainting, and sleeplessness. As the lament progresses, the poet turns further and further inward, retiring from speech in 77:5 and regressing entirely into the world of his thoughts in 77:6–7. While the *nefesh* is referred to explicitly in 77:3, the synonymous term *רוחי*, “my spirit,” has become the organ of this inner voice. This profound immersion in his predicament calls forth the internal speaking voice that we hear in 77:8–11, the verbs *אזכרה* and *אשיחה* in 77:7 introducing quoted speech.²⁵ The questions put forth in 77:8–10 about God’s inadequate response to his plight clarify the cause of this internal crisis. These questions about God’s inconsistent behavior are spoken by that part of the self that is here called *רוחי*, “my spirit,” elsewhere parallel to the *nefesh* (e.g., Isa 26:9; Job 7:11).

On the theological level the psalmist’s complaint is not merely the result of God’s lack of response but his greater anxiety that God has become unrecognizable to him. The three double questions in verses 8–10

24. On *המה*, see Harold L. Ginsberg, “Lexicographical Notes,” in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner*, ed. Benedikt Hartmann et al., VTSup 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 80; above with relation to Ps 42:6; on *אשיחה*, see Beat Weber, *Psalm 77 und sein Umfeld* (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995), 59–60.

25. NJPS places quotation marks around 77:8–10. Just as verbs of speaking in 77:12–13 introduce the quotation in 77:14–21, so the verbs *אזכרה* and *אשיחה* introduce the speech of the *nefesh* in 77:8–11. See Greenstein, “Extent of Job’s First Speech,” 251–52; Yitshak Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 144. On the role of these verbs in the structure of the psalm, see Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 275.

lay out the essence of the psalmist's conundrum by describing a reversal of the normative images of God in the Bible. Kselman and others have pointed to the psalmist's negative reading of the divine attributes of Exod 34:6–7.²⁶ Instead of חנון ורחום, אל חנון ורחום, the psalmist asks, “Has God forgotten how to pity? Has his anger stifled his compassion?” (השכח חנות אל אם-). (קפץ באף רחמיו). God's compassion has disappeared and his forbearance (ארך אפים) has been replaced by anger (אף) in 77:10. God has become an unfamiliar other, and this suspected transformation of the divine is the deeper cause of the psalmist's predicament.²⁷ He is no longer the generous, forgiving deity whom the psalmist had known in the past. As the speech progresses the questions intensify. Initially the ריוח asks whether God has become distant and disinterested. The absence of a direct object for the verbs זנה and רצה implies not just the emotional abandonment sensed by the *nefesh* but goes to the essence of the identity of the divine. The internal voice questions the normative modes of God's relating to the world. Has the quality of *hesed* disappeared from the God's personhood? In addition, if אמר in verse 9 refers to prophecy, has God ceased to communicate entirely? This anxiety is heightened further by the finality implied by the two verbs used in 77:9—אפס and גמר—and by the temporal adverbs that punctuate 77:8–9: לנצח, לעולמים, and לדור ודור. Even more striking, in 77:10 the psalmist describes God with verbs that actively express divine hostility: שכח is the deliberate reversal of memory, and קפץ is the very opposite of open-hearted giving. Has God become closed to the possibility of responding in love?

The questions posed by poet's ריוח, that innermost self that is synonymous with the *nefesh*, lead him to conclude that God has become foreign to him. The verb ואמר in 77:11 should be understood as “and so I concluded” that God *has* changed and that this is the cause of his “sickness.” The term חלותי is not indicative of sin or of some human failing (as in NJPS) but rather of a debilitated condition that has been brought about by the failure of God to act on his behalf. While it is usual in the psalms to explain suffering (and illness) as the result of sin, in Ps 77 (as in Pss

26. John S. Kselman, “Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus,” *JANESCU* 15 (1983): 51–58; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 277–78; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1991), 273.

27. I follow NJPS in translating the second stich of the verse as “The right hand of the Most High has changed.” See the discussion of alternatives in John A. Emerton, “The Text of Psalm LXXVII 11,” *VT* 44 (1994): 183–94.

42–43) it is God who has failed the psalmist, and no mention of human sin is found here.²⁸

The song of praise in verses 12–21 may reflect the response of the positive voice of the psalmist. The recitation of the great deeds of God in these verses has often been taken to be a rejoinder to the lament. Kselman's argument for the unity of the psalm has shown that the language of 77:12–21 picks up on the vocabulary of the first part of the psalm.²⁹ But it is far from certain that the conflicted voice heard in the first half is answered by the optimistic and outward-directed voice in the latter part.³⁰ As in Pss 42–43, the resolution of the tension between the voices is less than complete. In Pss 42–43 we saw a growing sense of hope as the psalm progressed in 43:1–4, but the return of the refrain in 43:5 indicated that the *nefesh* is never fully silenced, suggesting the lack of a positive resolution of the tension expressed in the psalm. In Ps 77 the placement of the hymn in verses 12–21 might be taken to indicate that the recitation of God's great acts serves to calm the distress expressed in the first half of the psalm. But since there is no explicit attempt by the psalmist to apply this sense of God as redeemer to the personal dilemma we saw in the lament, we are left with a stalemate between the two voices rather than a satisfying resolution.³¹

4. Lamentations 3

A third example of the interchange with the *nefesh* can be found in the acrostic poem in Lam 3. The lament begins with the speaking voice אֲנִי הַגֹּבֵר, describing in great detail the suffering he has undergone and the pain his body has borne.³² The first sixteen verses describe extreme physical distress, after which the *nefesh* is portrayed in 3:17 as emotionally and mentally disheartened, “bereft of well-being.” In 3:18–19 the actual voice of the *nefesh* declares its despair: “Lost is my future hope from the LORD.”³³

28. See above n. 21.

29. Kselman, “Psalm 77,” 57–58.

30. Note the exceptional emphasis on speech throughout the psalm, as references to sound and speaking appear no less than fifteen times in different forms: three times each in vv. 2 and 4; twice in vv. 7, 12, and 13; once in vv. 5, 9, and 11.

31. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 276; Tate, *Psalms* 51–100, 273.

32. On the nature of this “man,” see Edward L. Greenstein, “A Woman’s Voice in Lamentations 3” [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 24 (2016): 174–76.

33. The phrase is a hendiadys; see Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 2002), 84; Delbert Hillers, *Lamentations: A New*

The introduction of speech with ואמר and the absence of physical bodily references support the impression that a new voice is speaking.³⁴ Verse 19 continues the thoughts of the *nefesh* and should be read together with 3:20: “The memory³⁵ of my misery and trouble, bitterness and poison / [this] my *nefesh* recalls constantly and complains to me.” The *nefesh* portrays itself as simultaneously forgetting pleasure and recalling pain, over and over (זָכוֹר וְזָכוֹר) in order to heighten the sense of its hopelessness.

According to the *qere* of 3:20 the psalmist speaks about his *nefesh* being “bent over” (וּתְשׁוּחָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי), understanding the root to be שָׁחָה or שָׁחַ. But if we follow the *ketiv* (וּתְשִׁיחָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי), the verb שִׁיח gives the sense of the verse as “to converse,” “to consider,” or “to complain,” which is more appropriate to the context.³⁶ The doubled verb at the beginning of 3:20 indicates that the psalmist’s *nefesh* has been bemoaning its fate at least since 3:17. The response to the *nefesh* comes in verse 21, where there is a sudden change of perspective and the speaking voice gives answer to his “heart”: זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֵל לִבִּי.³⁷ As in Ps 77, the *lev* and the *nefesh* are synonymous terms for the interiority of the poet, and the verb אֲשִׁיב indicates a spoken response.

What follows in 3:22–25 is a striking about-face in which the speaking voice has somehow found faith, and the God who has afflicted him is now seen to be the very epitome of correct judgment. A similar theological dilemma to that described in the previous examples is found here as well: How can the God who afflicts the sufferer so severely be a source of faith and goodness? Once again the response of the poet has been to split the poetic voice: first a lamenting voice that details his divinely sponsored afflictions, followed by a profoundly aggrieved *nefesh* that reveals its complete despair. This is answered by another voice that describes a God who dispenses justice and renews his mercies daily, a voice that deems suffering to be a necessary precondition for self-correction. The poet dissociates, if you will, in the face of this theological and existential trauma and speaks

Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB 7A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 55.

34. On the connection between תְּקוּהָה and נִפְשִׁי note also Ps 62:6; Prov 24:14; Job 10:20.

35. Reading זָכוֹר as a noun.

36. Held, “Pits and Pitfalls,” 177; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 83.

37. On this shift, see Miriam J. Bier, “We Have Sinned and Rebelled; You Have Not Forgiven,” *BibInt* 22 (2014): 155–57.

with different voices. But in contrast to the previous examples from the Psalms, here the poet seems to experience a surprising transformation. Perhaps the depth of despair to which the *nefesh* has sunk serves as the catalyst for the poet's change of heart. In any case, the polyphonic response to the question of theodicy reflected in these voices suggests that the issue is not fully settled even at the conclusion of the poem. We see the poet's *agon* reflected in the changes in tone in the speaking voice here and in the continuation of the poem, and the possibility of a complete resolution remains uncertain.³⁸

5. Conclusion

In the three texts I have discussed we can see a similar theological dynamic in which the poet is confronted with God's lack of constancy in responding to him. At its most extreme this God may even be an active force in the suffering of the poet, and this perception of the divine threatens not only the poet's well-being but also his very confidence in the reliability of his God. In each text we see a similar constellation of verbs: *המה* indicating moaning or complaining; the use of memory; and the verb *זכר* in an attempt to persuade the *nefesh*. In each case an inner part of the self is deeply disturbed and complains to God with the verb *שיח*. While certain of these features can be found individually in other psalms of lament, their conjunction in these examples, together with the spoken words of the inner voice, constitutes a unique phenomenon in the language of biblical lament.

It is likely that further examples of this divided voice can be found in biblical poetry, perhaps in prophetic literature as well. We have long been aware of the idea of a conflicted self in the religious personality in the Bible. What I have tried to do here is to demonstrate how the poet has occasionally given expression to that conflict by allowing the *nefesh* to speak and to be addressed as a distinct voice within the self. The task of discovering unnoticed voices in biblical literature has been aided in recent years by the search for alternative voices in feminist criticism, by greater awareness of multiple voices in speech in biblical narrative,³⁹ and by uncovering various indications of quotation in biblical poetry. Hopefully this quest for hidden

38. Bier, "We Have Sinned," 158–67.

39. See George Savran, "Multivocality in Group Speech in Biblical Narrative," *JHS* 9 (2009), doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2009.v9.a25.

voices will be helpful in drawing a clearer picture of the complexities of direct speech in biblical poetry and, in this case, a more nuanced appreciation of the biblical self.

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God as Defendant, Advocate, and Judge in the Book of Job

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1. Introduction

How to conceive of God in relation to an increasingly ambivalent experience of the world is a question that arises relatively early in human history.¹ The emergence of this problem presupposes that categories of law and justice can coincide in some manner with a notion of the numinous. One can assume the formation of the first incipient forms of law in the Neolithic period, when herding and farming created the preconditions for wealth, the accumulation of capital, and social differentiation. Prior to this point, the production of foodstuffs was focused on immediate consumption, so legal problems could result in only a quite limited fashion.²

However, the formation of justice is not necessarily accompanied by impregnable portrayals of the divine linked with the notion of law and justice. In the polytheistic systems of the ancient Near East, one or more deities were entrusted with the function of protecting legal processes, but whether the divine world itself is just—or in monotheistic systems,

1. Cf., e.g., Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, eds., *Theodicy in the World of the Bible: The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Konrad Schmid, "Genealogien der Moral: Prozesse fortschreitender ethischer Qualifizierung von Mensch und Welt im Alten Testament," in *Gut und Böse in Mensch und Welt: Philosophische und religiöse Konzeptionen vom Alten Orient bis zum frühen Islam*, ed. Hans Günther Nesselrath and Florian Wilk; *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike* 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 83–102.

2. Cf. Hermann Parzinger, *Die Kinder des Prometheus: Eine Geschichte der Menschheit vor der Erfindung der Schrift*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2015), 720–35.

whether God is just³—remained a long journey that still has not been concluded. Ancient Near Eastern scribes more readily located the conception of justice in the meta-divine sphere, interpreting it as a foundational cosmic structure, thereby relieving the deities to some degree from the necessity of being just.⁴

However, the nature of the problem is laid out differently in monotheistic systems. Fundamental cosmic principles cannot exist independently: they must trace back to God. Yet can one conceive of God as both just and connected to the world? In view of the world's ambivalent nature, God seems to be either just and disconnected from the world or to be engaged with the world but not just.

The question appears unresolvable, though one can ponder it. The book of Job does this by means of a fictive thought experiment.

But first, some basic remarks on the interpretation of the book of Job are necessary. One cannot inquire into the theological position of the book of Job while disregarding its narrative progression.⁵ The book of Job is not

3. On this issue, cf. Konrad Schmid, "Differenzierungen und Konzeptualisierungen der Einheit Gottes in der Religions- und Literaturgeschichte Israels: Methodische, religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Aspekte zur neueren Diskussion um den sogenannten 'Monotheismus' im antiken Israel," in *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel*, ed. Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid, ATANT 82 (Zurich: TVZ, 2003), 11–38.

4. Cf. Eckart Otto, "Die biblische Rechtsgeschichte im Horizont des altorientalischen Rechts," in *Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte: Gesammelte Studien*, BZABR 8 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 56–82.

5. Introductory questions are discussed comprehensively by Jürgen van Oorschot, "Die Entstehung des Hiobbuches," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verita vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. Thomas Krüger et al., ATANT 88 (Zurich: TVZ, 2007), 165–84, who opts, however, for the originality of the dialogue and the secondary nature of the rearrangement through the frame narrative. In favor of their substantial coherence, see already Gustav Hölscher, *Das Buch Hiob*, HAT 1/17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1952), 4–5; and, more recently, Konrad Schmid, *Hiob als biblisches und antikes Buch: Historische und intellektuelle Kontexte seiner Theologie*, SBS 219 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010); Schmid, *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 190–91; Rüdiger Lux, *Hiob: Im Räderwerk des Bösen*, Biblische Gestalten 25 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), 57–65; Choon-Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Illuminations; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 26–39. Cf. also the discussion in Raik Heckl, *Hiob—vom Gottesfürchtigen zum Repräsentanten Israels*, FAT 70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 17–30.

saturated with just one theology that one might discover in like manner at the beginning, the middle, and the ending of the book. The book instead exposes its problem, treats it, and leads to its concluding statements with these all remaining in the world of the narrative itself. Accordingly, it is important to observe the development of particular positions in the book and to investigate this development itself—in all of its dynamics—with regard to the nature of its theological position.⁶

2. Job at Fault and God's "Justice": The Exposition of the Problem at the Beginning (Job 1–2) and Conclusion (Job 38–42)

Job was not a historical person but rather a function, the bearer of the theological problem of his book. Or in the words of Elie Wiesel, "Job never lived, though he has suffered immensely."⁷

The book presents not only Job himself in an exaggerated way, such that considering his person as a historical reality seems fruitless, but also God appears sketched boldly in the book of Job, in some places so that he, too, moves into the context of a thought experiment. The first scene in heaven in Job 1:5–12 introduces God as a heavenly king in the midst of his court whose first and only official business in the heavenly council consists of praising his pious servant Job to the sullen satan. In response, the satan proposes a test by which he aspires to dissuade Job of his piety—a test to which God readily agrees.

It is already clear from this description that Job experiences not only suffering in the book but also injustice. He becomes a plaything for powers on a higher level that are either proud of his piety (God) or downplay it because things are going well for him (the satan). Both the narrative and God himself in it establish that Job is innocent. His ruin takes place simply because the satan incites God against Job, which God himself explicitly maintains with respect to the satan: "You have incited me against him, to ruin him for no reason [חנם]."⁸

6. Cf. Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job as Polyphonic Text," *JSOT* 97 (2002): 87–108; Konrad Schmid, *Hiob als biblisches und antikes Buch*. On the history of scholarship see Carol A. Newsom, "Re-considering Job," *CurBR* 5 (2007): 155–82.

7. Eli Wiesel, *Adam oder das Geheimnis des Anfangs: Bräderliche Urgestalten*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1982), 211, my translation.

8. The verb וַתְּסִיֵּהוּ "You have incited me against him" represents a play on words with "satan." On the incitement, see Jürgen Ebach, "Ist es 'umsonst', dass Hiob gottes-

What Job possesses is taken from him, and when he has nothing left his health is also taken. It is interesting that, after the first heavenly scene, a post hoc conclusion insinuates that the satan is the one who authors the blows against Job, while the second heavenly scene explicitly states, “Then satan went out from YHWH’s presence and struck Job with horrible sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head” (2:7).⁹ After the first heavenly scene the text says only: “Then the satan went out from YHWH’s presence” (1:12).

As the reader knows and as Job himself infers, Job undergoes injustice despite his innocence. Therefore at the end of the prologue the question of God’s justice is posed: How will God act with regard to this injustice so that Job can possibly be restored to justice?

Two complementary answers come to this question in the concluding epilogue and in the preceding divine speeches of the book of Job. First, according to the epilogue, Job receives restitution, specifically according to the regulation of the Torah in Exod 22:3 (see also v. 8). What is stolen must be replaced twofold. In other words, with the double restitution of Job’s belongings in Job 42:10, God implicitly follows the corresponding legal regulation of a case in which stolen goods must be returned.

Only Job’s sons and daughters are replaced one for one, though the new daughters are much more beautiful than the first ones. The question must remain open whether, based on the omission of Job’s wife in Job 42, one should infer the necessity of her presence for Job’s happy end of life.¹⁰

So one answer is that Job receives double compensation for the injustice done to him. The other answer is that the case itself is not resolved. While God explains broad pieces of the creation order to Job in his speech, he does not mention the test that plunged him into misfortune. God appears to be more than his justice, and the case of Job’s injustice is not completely resolved on the level of a restoration of justice, which would require a minimum of transparency with regard to what has taken place.

fürchtig ist?’. Lexikographische und methodologische Marginalien zu **וְהָיָה** in Hi 1,9” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Erhard Blum et al. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 319–35.

9. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

10. One possible explanation might be that Job did not lose his wife. Job 42 pertains to persons and items that were killed, destroyed, or lost.

Taking these two answers together, God is just in the book of Job (the double restitution of Job demonstrates this), but God is not only just (this is shown by the divine speeches, which do not address what took place). How does the book of Job deal with this tension? For evaluating Job's situation before God, the following discussion will attempt to approach this question in relation to the legal categories used in the book of Job.¹¹

3. God as Defendant and Judge in the Book of Job: Juridical Paradigms in the Opening Lament and the Dialogues with the Friends

The prologue implicitly prepares the reader for the view that God is the defendant, though he first explicitly occupies this role in Job's first speech in Job 3, which stands alone to a certain degree. On the basis of the missing reference to the friends, it need not be assigned to the first cycle of speeches in Job 3–14.¹² The reader of the book already knows at the outset that God as the arbitrary author of Job's suffering is responsible for Job's fate. As a result of their added knowledge, readers can identify with the injustice. On the level of the narrative itself, however, this identification never takes place. Only Job himself says that what happens to him amounts to injustice. The narrator never pronounces him correct; God alone does this at the very end, in 42:7.¹³

11. This question has so far received comparatively little treatment in scholarship. Cf. esp. Edward L. Greenstein, "A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 241–58. See also Heinz Richter, *Studien zu Hiob: Der Aufbau des Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den Gattungen des Rechtslebens*, Theologische Arbeiten 11 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959); F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, BJS 348 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007); Carol A. Newsom, "The Invention of the Divine Courtroom in the Book of Job," in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Ari Mermelstein and Shalom E. Holtz, BibInt 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 246–59, as well as the literature cited in Greenstein, "Forensic Understanding," 242 n. 6.

12. Cf. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Das Buch Ijob," in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. Christian Frevel, 8th ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 414–27, here 416.

13. Cf. Manfred Oeming, "Ihr habt nicht recht von mir geredet wie mein Knecht Hiob: Gottes Schlusswort als Schlüssel zur Interpretation des Hiobbuchs und als kritische Anfrage an die moderne Theologie," *EvT* 60 (2000): 103–16.

So Job is correct, as the book does establish at the end, though it remains comparatively opaque. Is Job right because he insists on his claim? Is Job right because he laments to God? Exegesis presents a broad arsenal of possible explanations, but the formulation in Job 42:7 remains open.¹⁴ The book retains the juridically connoted term נְכוֹנָה “that which is right.” It is used when a situation takes place correctly,¹⁵ and it leaves readers to evaluate the polyvalence of the formulation.

So when one knows at the outset that Job, per the end of the book, innocently experiences injustice, then Job’s initial indirect indictment against God in his first long speech in Job 3 appears appropriate. It is situated after the arrival of the friends, who then sit with him for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13). Job’s accusation against God is often described as a lament, and it begins with a curse of the day of Job’s own birth. However, this long introductory speech moves bit by bit from lament to at least implicit accusation, demonstrated especially by the “why” statements in 3:11 and 3:20. It becomes clear in 3:20 at the latest that the lament has morphed into an indirect accusation that rhetorically questions the reasonableness of God’s activity. God is not addressed in the second-person but in the third-person. Job remarkably does not condemn suffering itself but rather the fact that God leaves people in their suffering instead of delivering them from suffering through death.

In this respect Job’s indictment hardly remains singularly focused, for he has no specific knowledge concerning the concrete author of his misfortune. However, the theological knowledge of the literary figure of Job remains such that he trusts that everything that happens concerns God, even if he cannot identify how to define this connection. Then again, the level of the narrative does not completely explicate the fact that the prologue establishes the satan as the negative driving force of the plot. The exclusive power of God is recognizable for the reader, however, in the fact that the satan is portrayed as nothing other than a

14. Cf. the discussion in Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid, *Hiobs Weg: Stationen von Menschen im Leid*, Biblisch-theologische Studien 45 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 131–42.

15. Cf. Deut 13:15; 17:4 as well as Ingo Kottsieper, “‘Thema verfehlt!': Zur Kritik Gottes an den drei Freunden in Hi 42,7–9,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Markus Witte, 2 vols., BZAW 345 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 2:775–85, here 779.

personified characteristic of God, as especially Hermann Spieckermann has demonstrated.¹⁶

Notably, Job's first speech in Job 3 does not use any specifically legal language. While it is an indictment, this indictment does not evoke juridical connotations. It concerns a theological accusation that, to an extent, condemns the absurdity of God's action, but it does not orient itself toward a legal paradigm.

Job's first friend, Eliphaz, initially introduces the legal thematic in his opening speech, which begins the first cycle of speeches.¹⁷ In 4:7 Eliphaz maintains that God is simultaneously a just judge and the enforcer of his judgment.¹⁸ In the eyes of Eliphaz, God has nothing to do with the place of the accused *for empirical reasons*. He is the sovereign judge whose justice can be verified by experience: "When have the innocent ever perished?"

Eliphaz's argument is circular, for it cannot be verified. Whoever perishes is guilty *by definition*. However, Eliphaz does recognize Job's dilemma: Job is innocent, but he has been crushed. For this reason, Eliphaz formulates his advice in 5:8 in a cautious way: "As for me [i.e., if I were in your place], I would seek God." Eliphaz refers Job to God as his judge—perhaps not by chance described with the rather open term "El" (אֱלֹהִים). Since God is just, he supposedly will therefore provide Job with justice. According to Eliphaz, Job errs in turning against God himself, who by definition can only be judge and not the accused.

However, in his answer in Job 6–7, Job cannot make much sense of this invitation, since, as Job can infer with some certainty, the one who is supposed to provide him with justice is the author of his ruin. Job then identifies him by name in 6:4 as Shaddai (שַׁדַּי); like Eliphaz, he is not an

16. Hermann Spieckermann, "Die Satanisierung Gottes: Zur inneren Konkordanz von Novelle, Dialog und Gottesreden im Hiobbuch," in "Wer ist wie du, HERR, unter den Göttern?": Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 431–44.

17. Also see the observations in Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, 59–70; however, traditional form criticism has strongly influenced his interpretation and evaluation.

18. On the problem of the assignment of the speech to Eliphaz (rather than to Job) in Job 4, cf. Edward L. Greenstein, "The Extent of Job's First Speech" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis: Presented to Menachem Cohen*, ed. Shmuel Vargon et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2005), 6:245–62; Ken Brown, *The Vision in Job 4 and Its Role in the Book: Reframing the Development of the Joban Dialogues*, FAT 2/75 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

Israelite. Job continues to forgo explicit legal terminology. He does not see his injury as punishment for guilt. At the same time, the origin of his trouble is clear to him: the catastrophes that befall Job according to 1:13–19 do not result from his own fault or that of a third person but are so-called acts of God. A pious man like Job could only interpret such strikes as divine blows, which is indeed what they are.

While Job does not initially offer a legal interpretation, the reader of the book relates differently to it. Striking intertextual receptions already become evident in Job's scourges in Job 2, such that Job's suffering is not only of divine origin but also contains punishment terminology from the Torah. When, according to 2:7, Job is struck with "horrible sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (בשחין רע מכף רגלך ועד קדקדך), the book of Job adopts the analogous formulation from the curse section of Deuteronomy that threatens such "horrible sores from the soles of the feet unto the crown of the head" (Deut 28:35) for those who fall away from God's commandments. Someone familiar with the Torah can thus infer that whoever exhibits sores from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head has become an object of divine wrath. It is striking that the concluding statement in Job's first speech in Job 3:25–26 is also influenced by Deut 28. Job's fears and catastrophe are expressed in Deuteronomistic diction.¹⁹

Job 3:25–26: For I *feared* a horror [פחד], and it befell me, and what I *feared* [יגר], this *came upon* me. I had no respite, and I had no rest, and I could not relax—for an *uproar* [רגז] came.

Deut 28:66–67: you will *fear* [פחד] day and night ... because of the horror of your hearts that you *fear*.

Deut 28:60: And he will turn against you all the diseases of Egypt that you *fear* [יגר].

Deut 28:15b, 45: and all these curses will *come upon* you.

Deut 28:65: and there YHWH will give you a *trembling* [רגז] heart.

19. Cf. Konrad Schmid, "Innerbiblische Schriftdiskussion im Hiobbuch," in Krüger et al., *Das Buch Hiob*, 241–61; also see Markus Witte, "Job in Conversation with the Torah," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd Schipper and Andrew Teeter, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81–100; Witte, "Does the Torah Keep Its Promise? Job's Critical Intertextual Dialogue with Deuteronomy," in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 534 (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 54–65.

Job himself would also know that his suffering bears features of the punishment for guilt from the Torah. One could deduce his guilt and the author of the punishment from the type of punishment. Yet Job's self-awareness does not become a topic here—again especially the reader can infer how Job conducts himself. It must for now remain undecided whether this implicit substructure should be interpreted as a criticism of Job or, on the contrary, as a critique of the Torah. The book of Job here appears to say that there is suffering that resembles, but is not, punishment for guilt.

In the sense of a short preview, one can also remark with regard to this borrowing from Deut 28 that Job is not the only one whom the book of Job characterizes with the Deuteronomistic terminology of transgression. In Job 42:8, God himself may also be depicted as a potential evildoer in the Deuteronomistic sense. He warns there of himself with the words: “that I do not do any iniquity to you” (לבלתי עשות עמכם נבלה). This terminology is quite striking, since “doing iniquity” belongs to Deuteronomistic ways of articulating transgression (Deut 22:21; Josh 7:15; Judg 19:23–24; 20:6, 10; 2 Sam 13:12; cf. Gen 34:7; Jer 29:23). While this phrase is otherwise the object of divine cursing, here alone in the Hebrew Bible it is applied to God himself.²⁰

In this respect these Deuteronomistic borrowings in the book of Job remain ambivalent. They appear to declare that this ideology cannot be accorded the final word. The Torah does not offer the book of Job a fixed interpretive paradigm but is instead the object of a critical intellectual approach.

Job's opening speeches up to chapter 6 primarily move within the horizon of the death wish from Job 3. Job clearly recognizes that there is no way out of his situation, so in his despair he accordingly asks God only that he would destroy him *completely and not only partially* (cf. 6:8–10). Job 6:10 is especially noteworthy: Job does not desire to be destroyed so that his suffering would end but rather so that in his piety he can retain his integrity and not infringe God's divinity. Yet Job remains alive, for it is only a hint (7:7), and this awareness now introduces a sudden turn. Job interprets the absence of his death as a gift and a task to speak in spite of his suffering (cf. 7:11). And beginning in Job 7, the character Job now introduces legal language. In the sense of the eventuality of his culpability, Job discusses God's function as judge. Even if, in the sense of an unreal pos-

20. Cf. Wolf-Dieter Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt: Die Prosatexte des Hiobbuches und ihre Rolle in seiner Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, BZAW 336 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 110.

sibility, Job had sinned, the arsenal of divine actions still has options other than retribution. In 7:20–21 Job appeals to the divine power of forgiveness. Can a human offense be so grave that God must destroy the human? Is it not God's business to forgive? In terms of theological history, Job here turns the Priestly theology against the Deuteronomistic one. Guilt need not be punished but rather may be forgiven. The theology of the Psalms also plays a role, as shown particularly in the reversal of Ps 8 in Job 7,²¹ as well as in the motif that Job "lays himself in the dust." The Psalms often argue that the death of the suppliant is of no use to God, for then the suppliant can no longer praise God (Ps 88).²²

The second friend, Bildad, follows this theological line of thought but never articulates it. Like Eliphaz before him, he remains committed to the Deuteronomistic paradigm. According to Job 8:3, God is just, and whoever is without guilt has nothing to fear.

God is just, but he does not guarantee immediate, automatic justice. Someone can address him, and then "he wakes up" (יעיר), but this requires time. Bildad thereby suppresses Job's own physical suffering and only considers his children, who were afflicted for their own guilt. God punishes the evildoer but not the innocent (8:20).

Job initially answers Bildad in 9:2 in a general, third-person manner, which anticipates the divine speeches: a human can never be in the right before God, and in a legal dispute he could never provide God an answer to one of a thousand questions.²³ During the divine speeches, God does ask Job many, though not literally a thousand, questions, and Job cannot answer any of them. In terms of the theological history, the wisdom position comes into play here. Humankind and God are qualitatively different

21. Cf. the detailed discussion in Christian Frevel, "‘Eine kleine Theologie der Menschenwürde’: Ps 8 und seine Rezeption im Buch Ijob," in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie des Alten, Ersten Testaments; Festschrift für Erich Zenger*, ed. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, HBS 44 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004), 244–72; see also Schmid, "Innerbiblische Schriftdiskussion im Hiobbuch."

22. Bernd Janowski, "Die Toten loben JHWH nicht: Psalm 88 und das alttestamentliche Todesverständnis," in *Auferstehung/Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium; Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Tübingen, September 1999)*, ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger, WUNT 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 3–45.

23. Following Seow, *Job 1–21*, 554, there is no need to understand Job 9:2 as ironic.

from one another: God knows everything and is wise, while humanity is limited.

Job's realization in 9:15 results from God's superiority: even if Job is correct, he must petition God for favor. Although God is the author of Job's misery, Job must still address him as the judge that God truly is and not as the defendant. If Job still happens to experience justice, then it can happen only on the basis of favor and not because of the judge's justice. Restitution for Job can take place only on the basis of God's grace, not on the basis of his justice, for God already suspended this at the beginning of the case, which Job can infer and the reader actually knows. Now while favor and mercy are integral elements of Hebrew Bible and also ancient Near Eastern law, they essentially remain limited to the classic *personae miserae*: widows, orphans, foreigners.²⁴ The law applies to those with legal capacity. Therefore when Job must appeal to the judge's favor, he demonstrates his awareness that there is no legal course of action for him.

God's comprehensive power is self-evident, so how can a power like God be legally prosecuted? Job 9:19–24 establishes that it is impossible. This passage is likely the most difficult in the entire book of Job, where Job recognizes that there is no way out of his situation. Whatever he says or does, he is an innocent sitting in injustice. Therefore God himself is, in the end, a sinner. He provides the innocent with no other possibility than to become guilty, for he does not bow to the law. Job 9:24 plays a significant role in the exegesis of Othmar Keel, to which I will return below.²⁵

Job 9:32–33 climaxes in the resigned assessment that the qualitative difference between humans and God renders impossible any legal action initiated on the part of humanity in a dispute with God. Therefore Job can only petition that God not pronounce him guilty (10:2).²⁶ According to Job, God himself knows that Job is innocent (10:6–7). When God acts unjustly, then there is no justice for humans; to invoke God is therefore

24. Cf. Annette Schellenberg, "Hilfe für Witwen und Waisen: Ein gemein-altorientalisches Motiv in wechselnden alttestamentlichen Diskussionszusammenhängen," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 180–200.

25. Cf. Othmar Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob: Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund zeitgenössischer Bildkunst*, FRLANT 121 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978); also see Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, *Wer ist der "Herr der Tiere"? Eine hermeneutische Problemanzeige* (Biblich-theologische Studien 85; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012).

26. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 579, provides the section of 10:2–17 with the title "Cross-Examination and Accusation."

pointless, and it only subjects the just to ridicule (12:4). However, Job's long speech that begins in Job 12 and concludes the first speech cycle (Job 4–14) ends with a long plea directed first against the friends (13:4–12) and then against God (13:20–28; cf. 13:3).

The problem escalates in the second cycle of speeches (Job 15–21), with Job articulating his dilemma in 16:20–21. There is no one besides God to whom he can turn. However, Job also knows that he has no hearing with God (19:6). God does not even listen to Job's outcry (19:7), which should also carry legal relevance (one must listen and respond).

What follows in 19:25–28 is a famous passage that at times has been placed in the center of the interpretation of Job. Here Job believes in God as his לֹאֵל, despite the absurdity of this position.²⁷ Whether one should overload this passage theologically is questionable. The function of a לֹאֵל consists not in the “redeemer” living so that the “redeemed” can die in safety but rather the opposite. The one receiving “redemption” is preserved.²⁸

At the end of the second speech cycle, Job's final speech in Job 21 begins with another emphatic address to God (21:4). In 21:7–21 Job stresses the success of the wicked, who must present God with an enduring challenge (21:22), and even sanctions the speeches of the friends as lies (21:34).

Finally, the third cycle of speeches consists of Eliphaz's accusation that Job has made himself guilty (22:23), even if only through his arrogant speech (22:29). Job rejects this argument and again presents the absence of divine judgment against the wicked as an indication for the invisibility of his action (21:4). However, in Job 26 Job then anticipates positions from the divine speeches in his praise and recognition of God's creational power.²⁹ In Job 27 (cf. esp. 27:2–6) he reaffirms his innocence.

27. See, e.g., Theresia Mende, “‘Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt’ (Ijob 19,25): Ijobs Hoffnung und Vertrauen in der Prüfung des Leidens,” *TTZ* 99 (1990): 15–35; Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, “‘Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt’ (Hiob 19,23–27),” in Witte, *Gott und Mensch im Dialog*, 2:667–88.

28. Cf. Rainer Kessler, “‘Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebet’: Sozialgeschichtlicher Hintergrund und theologische Bedeutung der Löser-Vorstellung in Hiob 19,25,” *ZTK* 89 (1992): 139–58. As C. L. Seow demonstrates (“Job's *gō'ēl*, Again,” in Witte, *Gott und Mensch im Dialog*, 2:689–709, here 708; cf. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 802–9), the passage appears to contain several pieces of irony.

29. Job 26:5–14 seems to be an originally independent hymn praising God for his creation that only secondarily has been included in Job's speech in Job 26; see, e.g., Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*, KAT 16 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd

Even in his concluding plea in Job 29–31,³⁰ Job laments again that his cries go unheard (cf. 30:20). In his concluding oath of purity in Job 31, he lists no fewer than fourteen offenses of which he is innocent. But still God does not listen to him, as Job establishes in 31:35. Job's oath of purity therefore ends, on the one hand, with the assertion of his innocence and, on the other, with the knowledge that innocence is worthless to him.

4. God's Cosmic Justice: The Divine Speeches

What happens next is complex and difficult to understand.³¹ God answers Job (38:1). This in itself is remarkable. The fact that God—as is literally emphasized—“answers” apparently means that he initially acts in the formal role of a defendant rather than as a judge. He responds to Job's accusation and his oath of purity.

God only adopts the legal thematic indirectly with regard to Job in the divine speeches.³² By means of rhetorical questions, God demonstrates Job's incompetence as a witness.³³ In addition, however, he does point out the lawful organization of the cosmos, into which the order of life fits and which also necessitates the eventual end of the wicked (38:13–14; cf. 40:12). God commands the dawn, such that every morning it “shakes the wicked” from the earth (וַיַּעַרְרֵם מִן־הָאָרֶץ). God explicitly uses juridical language in the second speech to Job (cf. 40:1–8). “God's justice” is there-

Mohn, 1963), 383; David Wolfers, “Job 26: An Orphan Chapter,” in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A. M. Beuken, BETL 114 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 387–91.

30. Cf. in detail Daniela Opel, *Hiobs Anspruch und Widerspruch: Die Herausforderungsreden Hiobs (Hi 29–31) im Kontext frühjüdischer Ethik*, WMANT 127 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010).

31. The Elihu speeches of Job 32–37 are bracketed out, although Seow explains them as integral to the book of Job in his new commentary. Cf. Tanja Pilger, *Erziehung im Leiden: Komposition und Theologie der Elihureden in Hiob 32–37*, FAT 2/49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Seow, *Job 1–21*, 31–37. On the history of scholarship, see Markus Witte, “Noch einmal: Seit wann gelten die Elihureden im Hiobbuch (Kap. 32–37) als Einschub?,” *BN* 67 (1993): 20–25.

32. On this see Petra Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt? – Gottes Antwort an Ijob: Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und exegetische Studie zur ersten Gottesrede Ijob 38 und 39*, *Altes Testament und Moderne* 5 (Münster: LIT, 2000).

33. Cf. Greenstein, “Forensic Understanding,” 248–55, esp. 256: “YHWH's demonstration of Job's incompetence to bear witness, and consequently to prosecute God, is a matter of legal form, not substance.”

fore something different from Job's justice. God confirms Job's position from the dialogues that a person cannot be in the right with God. Because God works everything, he does not owe anyone anything and, accordingly, cannot be prosecuted for anything (41:3). As Keel has stressed about the second divine speech, the topic of Behemoth and Leviathan prominently resumes the theme of evil, as Behemoth and Leviathan are seen as representations of chaos in ancient Near Eastern iconography:

Job describes God in 9:24 as *rāš'ā*, but repeatedly describes himself as just (*šaddiq*; 12:4; 17:9; 13:18). Now God counters: If Job so completely embodies justice and God epitomizes injustice, then Job should for once send the *rāš'ā'im* to the Underworld and destroy the powers of evil (Behemoth and Leviathan).³⁴

God's justice is, therefore, of a different nature from the kind that Job demands. God's justice has cosmic dimensions: it establishes and preserves the world, but it is not directed toward short-term compensation for damages and the restitution of victims. While the twofold restitution of Job in Job 42 shows that God's justice does not exclude such compensation, it is not the central characteristic.

Several noteworthy observations result when one compares Job's expectations and God's answer with a reconstruction of the religious history of divine justice in ancient Israel. Due to space restrictions, the following considerations must remain undeveloped.

5. The Religious History of Divine Justice and the Book of Job

Today we know with sufficient reliability that the biblical God was originally a weather deity akin to the Northwest Semitic Baal,³⁵ even if it remains debated whether he originally came from the south or the north.³⁶

34. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung*, 154–55, my translation.

35. Cf., e.g., Martin Leuenberger, *Gott in Bewegung: Religions- und theologiegeschichtliche Beiträge zu Gottesvorstellungen im alten Israel*, FAT 76 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen*, BZAW 387 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); see also Sebastian Grätz, *Der strafende Wettergott: Erwägungen zur Traditionsgeschichte des Adad-Fluchs im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, BBB 114 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998).

36. Cf. Henrik Pfeiffer, *Jahwes Kommen vom Süden: Jdc 5; Hab 3; Dtn 33 und Ps 68 in ihrem literatur- und theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld*, FRLANT 211 (Göttingen:

In any case, he did not originally have a connection with the theme of justice: weather deities do not need to be just. They can be angry, and they can show themselves in tremendous theophanies, but they are not in charge of legal questions. In the ancient Near Eastern pantheon, this task instead falls to the sun deity, which, for example, appears clearly on Hammurabi's stela. The sun deity presents Hammurabi with a ring and staff, which is generally interpreted as divine authorization for the royal legislator.³⁷ The biblical God, with roots as a weather deity, then was solarized over the course of his Judahite religious history, as outlined by Keel.³⁸ Keel may have been too mechanical in conceiving of YHWH as replacing an original or pre-Yahwistic sun deity in Jerusalem.³⁹ Nevertheless, it is clear that the sun cult was traditionally connected to the city of Jerusalem, as shown simply by its name: *uru-šalim*, "City of Dusk" (*šaḥar* and *šalim* designate dawn and dusk). Given this background of a weather deity, YHWH's solarization in the course of his relocation to Jerusalem involved his entrance

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); contrast Martin Leuenberger, "Jhwhs Herkunft aus dem Süden: Archäologische Befunde – biblische Überlieferungen – historische Korrelationen," *ZAW* 122 (2010): 1–19; and in turn Henrik Pfeiffer, "Die Herkunft Jahwes und ihre Zeugen," *BTZ* 30 (2013): 11–43.

37. Cf. Gabriele Elsen-Novák and Mirko Novák, "Der 'König der Gerechtigkeit': Zur Ikonologie und Teleologie des 'Codex' Ḥammurapi," *BaghM* 37 (2006): 131–55.

38. Othmar Keel, "Der salomonische Tempelweihspruch: Beobachtungen zum religionsgeschichtlichen Kontext des Ersten Jerusalemer Tempels," in *Gottestadt und Gottesgarten: Zur Geschichte und Theologie des Jerusalemer Tempels*, ed. Othmar Keel and Erich Zenger, QD 191 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 9–23; Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel 4.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 335–36; Keel, "Sonne der Gerechtigkeit: Jerusalemer Traditionen vom Sonnen- und Richter Gott," *BK* 63 (2008): 215–18.

39. Cf. Friedhelm Hartenstein, "Sonnengott und Wettergott in Jerusalem? Religionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zum Tempelweihspruch Salomos im masoretischen Text und in der LXX (1 Kön 8,12f // 3Reg 8,53)," in *Mein Haus wird ein Bethaus für alle Völker genannt werden (Jes 56,7): Judentum seit der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels in Geschichte, Literatur und Kult; Festschrift für Thomas Willi zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Julia Männchen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), 53–69; Martin Rösel, "Salomo und die Sonne: Zur Rekonstruktion des Tempelweihspruchs I Reg 8,12f.," *ZAW* 121 (2009): 402–17; cf. the reference by Othmar Keel, "Minima methodica und die Sonnengottheit von Jerusalem," in *Iconography and Biblical Studies: Proceedings of the Iconography Sessions at the Joint EABS / SBL Conference, 22–26 July 2007, Vienna, Austria*, ed. Izaak de Hulster and Rüdiger Schmitt, AOAT 361 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009), 213–23.

into the sphere of justice (Zeph 3:5). Here God's justice is linked with Jerusalem and with the rising of the sun.⁴⁰ A connection between light and justice was also familiar to the scribe behind Hos 6:5. The traditional link between the solar traditions of Jerusalem and the theme of justice also appears in the conception of Jerusalem as the "City of Justice," as presented in Isa 1:21 and Ps 48:11–12.⁴¹

In the traditional setting of the Jerusalem cult, YHWH becomes the God who makes law and establishes justice upon the earth, but as the book of Job stresses, he is not necessarily contained by the category of justice.

This view of Jerusalem's preexilic cultic tradition was then strongly changed within the framework of the Deuteronomistic tradition, which took precisely this step of placing God within the category of justice. If it is correct that Deuteronomy must be viewed as a subversive reception of Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties, with God in the position of the covenant partner, then it becomes clear that the relationship between God and his people becomes conceived as juridical. God commits himself to the law, and what is held true in Deuteronomy is the following: if God is God, then he is just; and if he is not just, then he is not God. This is precisely what the book of Job contests, so it naturally results in a conflict with the Torah.⁴²

While the dialogue between Job and his friends circles around aspects of this paradigm of God's justice at any price, the divine speeches reject it. With regard to the question of God's justice, they return, in religious-

40. Cf. Bernd Janowski, *Rettungsgewißheit und Epiphanie des Heils: Das Motiv der "Hilfe Gottes am Morgen" im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, WMANT 59 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989); Janowski, "JHWH und der Sonnengott: Aspekte der Solarisierung JHWHs in vorexilischer Zeit," in *Pluralismus und Identität*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 8 (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1995), 214–41.

41. Cf. on Isa 1:21: Odil Hannes Steck, "Zur konzentrischen Anlage von Jes 1,21–26," in *Auf den Spuren der schriftgelehrten Weisen: Festschrift für Johannes Marböck anlässlich seiner Emeritierung*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer; BZAW 331; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 97–103; Konrad Schmid, *Jesaja 1–23*, ZBK 19.1 (Zurich: TVZ, 2011), 56–58; Bernd Janowski, "Die 'Übernachtung' der Gerechtigkeit: Zum Gottes- und Menschenbild von Jes 1,21–26," in *Gott und Mensch im Alten Testament*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Andreas Wagner, VWGTh 52 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 163–77. On Ps 48:11–12 see Corinna Körting, *Zion in den Psalmen*, FAT 48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

42. Cf., for a complex redaction history, Witte, "Job in Conversation," 97–98.

historical terms, to the rather traditional conception of the Jerusalem cult. That is, God creates justice in cosmic dimensions, but this does not subordinate him to a justice paradigm.⁴³

For this reason, the book of Job transcends the possible functions of God as defendant, advocate, and judge in Job's fictive legal dispute with him regarding a comprehensive depiction of God who is located beyond such functions. God's justice expresses itself in his power in creation, which may not immediately punish the evildoer but in the end will shake him from the earth and guarantee a dynamic world for the living.

In contrast to the juridical form of humanity's relationship with the divine, the book of Job opts fundamentally for the archaic conception of a comprehensive notion of justice, which is primarily describable in mythic terms as being of a cosmic nature. As such, the book of Job not only takes place in the opaque prehistory of the patriarchs, but it also attempts to bolster the classic tradition with regard to its theological perspective. At the same time, the twofold restitution of Job offers an alternative reading that interprets God's justice as a possible variation of his freedom. In the framework of the text's world, the book of Job does not harmonize these positions but instead lets them overlap. The fact that the narrator does not choose one over the other is, therefore, of great significance. This demonstrates that divine justice in the book of Job represents, in the end, an interpretive rather than a metaphysical problem. Following Ed Greenstein, one can therefore observe:

Without in any way denying that the Book of Job examines a number of theological issues and human concerns, I have increasingly formed the impression that, even more than the book is about issues and themes, it is about the ways that we talk about them.⁴⁴

43. On the attention to the poor, see Michael Weigl, "Zefanja und das 'Israel der Armen': Zu den Ursprüngen biblischer Armentheologie," *BK* 50 (1995): 6–11; Ulrich Berges, "Die Armen im Buch Jesaja: Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des AT," *Bib* (1999): 153–77; Thomas Krüger, "Gott als Schöpfer der Armen im Proverbiabuch," in *Weisheit und Schöpfung: Festschrift für James Alfred Loader zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Stefan Fischer and Marianne Grohmann, Wiener alttestamentliche Studien 7 (Frankfurt: Lang, 2010), 169–82; Johannes Bremer, "Strukturbeobachtungen zur Armentheologie des Psalters," in *Die kleine Biblia: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen und des Psalters*, ed. Markus Saur, Biblisch-theologische Studien 148 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014), 1–36.

44. Edward L. Greenstein, "Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the

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Book of Job," *PSB* 27 (2006): 238–59; cf. on this topic also Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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Conversation with One's Heart or Soul in Wisdom Literature

Nili Shupak

Introduction

The literary pattern of speech to one's heart or soul characterizes Egyptian speculative wisdom literature, which developed against the backdrop of the collapse of centralized rule during the First Intermediate Period, at the beginning of the second millennium BCE. This literature consists of five works that are similar in literary form, style, language, content, and even the pessimistic spirit with which they are infused: The Admonition of an Egyptian Sage (The Admonitions of Ipuwer), The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb, The Prophecies of Neferti, The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, and The Dispute between a Man and His Ba (The Man Who Was Tired of Life). All these works describe chaos reigning throughout the country and depict various social ills: injustice, robbery, violence, faithlessness, estrangement between brothers, and reversal of social order. They also direct their criticism toward religious issues, such as the disregarding of religious obligations, neglect of the ceremonial cult and the alienation of the gods from the people (Admonitions and Khakheperre-sonb).¹ All

It is a great pleasure for me to dedicate this essay to my dear colleague and friend Ed Greenstein as a token of gratitude for his enormous contribution to our understanding of the biblical and ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature in general and the book of Job in particular.

1. On the affinity between these works, see Nili Shupak, "Egyptian 'Prophecy' and Biblical Prophecy: Did the Phenomenon of Prophecy, in the Biblical Sense, Exist in Ancient Egypt?," *JEOL* 31 (1989–1990): 19–24. Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of excerpts from these five works is taken from my translations in *COS* 1:93–110; 3:321–25. Translations of other Egyptian texts follow *AEL*.

these cause such great suffering and trouble that some wish for death: “Surely great and small are saying ‘I wish I could die’” (Admonitions 2.2; cf. Dispute 130–142).

Among these five works, two stand out emphasizing not general or national suffering but the travails of the individual: *The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb* and *The Dispute between a Man and His Ba*.² The priest from Heliopolis (*Khakheperre-sonb*), seeks to utter words of wisdom heretofore unspoken, while the protagonist of the *Dispute* experiences internal conflicts with regard to different issues related to death. The personal difficulty of both arises from their critical approach to widespread traditional dogmas. *Khakheperre-sonb*’s desire is expressed in these words:

He says:
 Would I had unknown phrases,
 Maxims that are strange,
 Novel untried words,
 Void of repetitions;
 Not maxims of past speech,
 Spoken by the ancestors (recto 2–3).
 Would that I knew what others do not know,
 Things that have never been repeated (recto 7).

The priest of Heliopolis thus seeks to author novel maxims never before stated or written, rather than repeating traditions that have preceded him. This declaration defies the accepted mode of learning among the schools of Egyptian sages, that of adaptation and transmission of ancient wisdom from generation to generation, a role inherited by sons from their fathers, as reflected in, for example, *The Instruction of Ptahhotep* 588–594 and *The Instruction Addressed to Merikare* 34–36.³

2. Although the background of the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* is evil committed against an individual, his complaints are nevertheless directed at social corruption in general.

3. Cf. Boyo Ockinga, “The Burden of Kha-kheperre-sonbu,” *JEA* 69 (1983): 88–95; Leonard H. Lesko, “Some Comments on Ancient Egyptian Literacy and Literati,” in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, ed. S. Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 2:666–67; Gerald Moers, “The Interplay of Reenactment and Memory in the Complaints of Khakheperreseneb,” *LingAeg* 10 (2002): 298–301. For other explanations of *Khakheperre-sonb*’s unwillingness to repeat wisdom transmitted to him, unrelated to motives of originality and creativity, see R. B. Parkinson, “*Khakheperreseneb* and Traditional Belles Lettres,” in *Studies in Honor of William Kelly*

A son who hears is a follower of Horus [the king],
 It goes well with him when he has heard.
 When he is old, has reached veneration,
 He will speak likewise to his children,
 Renewing the teaching of his father ...
 He will speak to the children,
 So that they will speak to their children. (AEL 1:75)

Justice [Maat] comes to him distilled,
 Shaped in the sayings of the ancestors.
 Copy your fathers, your ancestors ...
 See their words endure in books,
 Open, read them, copy their knowledge. (AEL 1:99)

According to the traditional conception, the scribe is only a link in a chain of transmission of traditions of wisdom originating in the advice of the ancient patriarchs. It is handed down to him filtered, that is, condensed. This conception is also reflected in the Egyptian wisdom instructions that draw on earlier sources for their content and frequently quote them.⁴

In *The Dispute between a Man and His Ba*, the accepted view of death, which is also familiar from burial inscriptions and official writings, is thrown into doubt. According to Egyptian tradition, preparations for death—building a tomb, embalming the body, funeral rites, offerings to the dead—are indispensable to ensure the continued existence of the deceased in the afterlife. The tomb symbolizes the person and his or her achievements over the course of a lifetime. It is therefore unsurprising that the demand of the father to take care in building a tomb is repeated in various wisdom instructions: “Make good your dwelling in the grave-

Simpson, ed. P. Der Manuelien and R. Freed, 2 vols. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996), 2:647–54, who holds that the priest seeks to avoid repeating traditions of the past out of fear that they will become worn and lose their effectiveness. Moers (“Interplay of Reenactment”) hypothesizes that the critical approach of Khakheperre-sonb to the preceding literary tradition, which was based on repetition of sayings of the past in order to create “collective memory,” stems from his desire to construct a personal identity for himself as an author.

4. See Nili Shupak, *‘No Man Is Born Wise’: Ancient Egyptian Wisdom Literature and Its Contact with Biblical Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2016), 26, 52, and table 3. On the responsibility of the Egyptian scribes for preserving the memory of the past by collecting and reciting ancient traditions, thereby creating a connection between past and future, see Moers, “Interplay of Reenactment,” 299–301.

yard, / Make worthy your station in the West [the realm of the dead]" (The Instruction of Djedefhor 2.2; *AEL* 1:58; cf. Instruction Addressed to Merikare 127–128; The Instruction of Amenemhet h15).⁵ The Ba casts doubt on the effectiveness of these preparations (60–67). It rejects the positive image of death as a release from a life of suffering posited by the man (56–60).

Khakheperre-sonb and the "man who is tired of life" raise doubts concerning accepted traditions, and their statements are particularly defiant. Still, these do not offer any solutions for their difficulties and inner conflicts, ultimately driving them to return to conventional modes of thought. Khakheperre-sonb is unable to compose any new sayings or create a new style of expression; later in his work, when he sets out to describe the dismal situation of society, he returns to the sayings of those who preceded him. Like them, he paints a picture of the land's desolation and criticizes contemporary societal wounds (recto 10–12, verso 1–6), while *The Dispute between a Man and His Ba* culminates in a compromise founded on an adaptation of the conventional approach to preparations for death.⁶

Aside from this critical approach to traditional conventions, the two compositions share another feature that sets them apart from the other works of speculative Egyptian wisdom literature. Both exhibit the literary pattern under discussion here: a conversation between a person and his heart or soul. The priest Khakheperre-sonb repeatedly requests that his heart shares his afflictions:

Then I would explain to it [to the heart] my distress,
Then I would shift to it the burden which is on my back,
The matters that oppress me,
I would express to it what I suffer through it
And I would say "ah" with relief (recto 8–9).

A stout heart in trouble, is the companion to his master. (recto 13)⁷

5. See Shupak, 'No Man Is Born Wise,' 102 n. 13.

6. On the similarity between Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb and the four other speculative works vis-à-vis content, literary form, style, and vocabulary, see above, n. 1; and Friedrich Junge, "Die Welt der Fragen," in *Fragen an die altägyptischen Literatur: Studien zu Gedanken an E. Otto*, ed. J. Assmann et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1977), 275–84; Ockinga, "Burden of Kha-kheperre-sonbu," 91–92.

7. See also Khakheperre-sonb recto 13–14 and verso 5–6.

But his heart does not answer his supplications. The man who is tired of life fares better: the *Ba* is a willing partner in dialogue with him, though it threatens to leave him if he continues to complain of his bitter fate.⁸

The view of the heart as a separate entity that can stand at one's side in a time of trouble is common in Egyptian literature. Not so with regard to the *ba*, which appears as a dialogic partner only to the man "who is tired of life."

We will therefore investigate: (1) What are the reasons and contexts in which this unique literary pattern of conversation between a person and his *ba* appears? (2) Is there a difference between the speech of a person to his heart and a conversation with his *ba*? (3) Do these patterns have parallels in the Bible? First, however, a few words on the meaning of the terms "heart" and "soul" in Egyptian.

The Terms "Heart" and "Soul" in Egyptian

The synonyms *ib* and *H3ty* denote the heart in Egyptian. In speculative wisdom literature, the term *ib* is most often used, appearing in the pattern that is the subject of our discussion. The term is polysemic, its chief meanings being: (1) the seat of wisdom and a tool for the acquisition of knowledge—the most widespread meaning in didactic wisdom literature; and (2) a symbol for the inner life of the person, the dwelling place of his

8. Because of the similarity of the Dispute to the Complaints, Christophe Barbotin ("Le Dialogue de Khâkheperreseneb avec son *Ba*," *REg* 63 [2012]: 1–20) has posited that the complaints of the priest from Heliopolis constitute the lost opening of the Dispute. However, the opening that appears in the latter work, which is unlike all else in speculative wisdom literature and in which the protagonist complains of his inability to say anything new, does not suit the novel message of the Dispute. As we have seen above, there we encounter the unprecedented idea of skepticism regarding the prevailing view of death and the afterlife. It is also difficult to reconcile the transition from addressing a passive, unresponsive heart in Khakheperre-sonb to the conversation with a willful *ba* in the Dispute. Each of these concepts emphasizes a different aspect of humans (see below). See also R. B. Parkinson, "The Text of Khakheperreseneb: New Reading of EA 5645, and an Unpublished Ostrakon," *JEA* 83 [1997]: 66 and n. 38, who argues that the Complaints are preserved in their entirety. In this context, it should be noted that the Complaints are preserved on a wooden writing tablet (BM 5645) dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty and on an ostrakon in the Cairo Museum also from this period. It is assumed that the work was composed at the earliest during the reign of Sesostris II (Twelfth Dynasty, ca. 1880 BCE), after whom the protagonist is named.

emotions—the common usage in speculative wisdom literature. At times the heart represents one's personality and moral character. This significance is reflected in the Egyptian judgment of the dead, wherein the heart is weighed against the symbol of the goddess of justice, Maat, to determine if the deceased will merit a place in the afterlife.⁹ The heart is the center of a person, but it is not identical to the person; the heart is viewed as a separate, independent entity. It can determine a person's fate: "Man's heart is his life—prosperity—health!" says the sage (The Instruction of Ptahhotep 552; *AEL* 1:74); A heart that is not satisfied can testify against its owner at the judgment of the dead. On the other hand, a wise heart "is companion to his master" in times of trouble (Khakheperre-sonb recto 13). Not only the priest from Heliopolis seeks to share his suffering with his heart; the prophet Neferti shares similar emotions with his heart: "Stir, my heart, bemoan this land" (Prophecies of Neferti 20). So, too, the shipwrecked sailor who spends three days along with his heart "as companion" (The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor 40; *AEL* 1:212). It therefore comes as no surprise that in late demotic instruction the sage is defined as he who takes his heart for a companion at a time of misfortune (P.Insinger 21.5; *AEL* 3:202).

In summary, the characterization of the heart as a companion or conversational partner is common in Egyptian literature. On the other hand, the phenomenon of a *ba* that actively speaks with its owner is unique; it appears in wisdom literature, to my knowledge, only in the Dispute. What is the *ba*?

The *ba* is one of the elements that make up a person (alongside the *ka* and the *akh*).¹⁰ It symbolizes the vital forces (*Lebenspotenz*) and the

9. For a comprehensive discussion on the different meanings of the term "heart" in Egyptian literature, see Hellmut Brunner, "Herz," *LÄ* 2:1158–68; Brunner, "Das Herz im ägyptischen Glauben," in *Das Hörende Herz*, ed. W. Röllig, OBO 80 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 8–41; Nili Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found? The Sage's Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, OBO 130 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 297–311. Due to the importance of the heart in the judgment of the dead, the Egyptians resorted to magical and ceremonial means of preserving it, such as the incantations in the Book of the Dead, which guaranteed that the deceased would retain his heart in the afterlife, or insertion of a heart-shaped scarab into the mummy's shroud. See Jan Assmann, "Zur Geschichte des Herzens im Alten Ägypten," in *Die Erfindung des inneren Menschen: Studien zur religiösen Anthropologie*, ed. J. Assmann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), 88–90.

10. For an extensive study of the *ba*, see Louis V. Zabkâr, *A Study of the BA concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, SAOC 34 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968);

ability to act. This Egyptian term has no parallel in modern languages, although it is regularly translated “soul.” The *ba* possesses a godly character.¹¹ This is hinted in The Instruction Addressed to Merikare, where the heir apparent is advised to aid his *ba* through the priestly service and offering of sacrifices at the temple (64–65, *AEL* 1:102). While it appears as an autonomous entity even before death (The Instruction of Ptahhotep 524–525, *AEL* 1:73), it is most active afterward. The quality of life of the deceased in the afterlife depends greatly on the person's *ba*. The *ba*, which is part of a person during his or her lifetime, leaves the body at death. It is depicted as a bird with a human head, and its various physical abilities—drinking, eating, engaging in sex, and mobility—allow it to represent the person in the afterlife. The *ba* hovers in the sphere of the gods during the day, and at night it returns to the tomb and reunites with the embalmed body. The unification of the *ba* and the body brings about the reanimation of the deceased.

The appearance of the *ba* as a partner in conversation or interlocutor in a debate is remarkable. What are the reasons and contexts in which this unique literary pattern occurs within The Dispute between a Man and His Ba?

The Dispute between a Man and His Ba: Content and Ideology

This work, only one copy of which has survived (P.Berlin 3024), was almost certainly written during the Twelfth Dynasty, in the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (ca. second millennium BCE). The text contains errors, lacunae, and obscure passages. The opening of the work, which originally comprised around thirty lines, has been lost, but nine to ten lines of it have been preserved in P.Amherst 3 and reconstructed by Parkinson.¹² Recently

Wienfried Barta, *Das Gespräch eines Mannes mit seinem Ba* (Papyrus Berlin 3024), MÄS 18 (Berlin: Hessling, 1969), 68–97; Antonio Loprieno, “Drei Leben Nach dem Tod. Wieviele Seelen hatten die alten Ägypter?” in *Grab und Totenkult im alten Ägypten für Jan Assmann von Seinen Kollegen, Schülern und Freuden*, ed. H. Kusch et al. (Munich: Beck, 2005), 200–225.

11. Barta, *Das Gespräch*, 86–87. In New Kingdom literature as well, the heart is mentioned as the residence of the divinity in humans, its shrine being the belly. See Instruction of Amenemope 1.9 (*AEL* 2:148); and Bernard Couroyer, “Amenemope i 9, iii 13: Égypt ou Israël?” *RB* 68 (1961): 394–400; Assmann, “Zur Geschichte des Herzens,” 107–11.

12. R. B. Parkinson, “The Missing Beginning of ‘The Dialogue of a Man and His Ba’: P. Amherst III and the History of the ‘Berlin Library,’” *ZÄS* 130 (2003): 120–33;

Marina Escolano-Povedo published fragments from P.Mallorca 1, 2, which she believes to be part of the lost sections of P.Berlin 3024 as well.¹³

The Dispute between a Man and His Ba was composed with a high level of linguistic skill. Often the text lacks conceptual continuity, and unity is established through the repetition of words, phrases, and whole lines that usually appear at the beginning of stanzas.¹⁴ Since the central topic of the work—meditations on death—is a universal topic that concerns all human beings per se, the work has attracted much interest, and a number of commentaries and studies have been devoted to it.¹⁵ Due to space constraints, I will lay out my own interpretation only.

An ill (*mr* in Egyptian) man suffers from the ills of the time—chiefly from the deficiencies of a corrupt society, which are described at length in poem 1 (lines 103–130).¹⁶ He lost his property (30–33) and good reputation (86–103) and probably his family (hinted in the first *ba*'s parable, 69–80); he feels lonesome and abandoned and longs for death. He contemplates a number of issues related to death: Should one prefer an immediate death or a natural one? What is the best mode of earthly life: worry and preparation for death or unreflective pleasures? Imagining death, he wonders: Do the dead live in darkness, far from the light of the sun, or do they

cf. James P. Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul*, CHANE 44 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 19–22.

13. Marina Escolano-Povedo, “New Fragments of Papyrus Berlin 3024,” *ZÄS* 144 (2017): 16–54.

14. See Shupak, “Egyptian ‘Prophetic’ Writings and Biblical Wisdom Literature,” *BN* 54 (1990): 97 (table).

15. For a review of the relevant literature, see Ronald J. Williams, “Reflections on the Lebensmüde,” *JEA* 48 (1962): 49–52; Barta, “Das Gespräch,” 101–15; Katharina Lohmann, “Das Gespräch eines Mannes mit seinem Ba,” *SAK* 25 (1998): 207–10; Allen, *The Debate*, 1–2.

16. These are strikingly similar to those described in the other works in the genre of speculative wisdom. Cf., e.g., the description of social corruption in the Dispute to the Prophecies and Admonition in the following passages: Dispute 103–104, 114–117 to Prophecies 44–45; Dispute 107 to Admonitions 5:10; Dispute 114–115 to Admonitions 1:5, 5:10; Dispute 115–116 to Admonitions 5:12–13. In the fragments published by Escolano-Povedo (“New Fragments of Papyrus Berlin 3024”), the term “ill” (*mr* in Egyptian) appears twice. While it is unclear if this refers to physical or mental illness, Escolano-Povedo leans toward the view that the man suffers from mental illness as a result from the evil done to him, as well as the loss of his family and property. Lying in his deathbed, at the stage where the *ba* separates from the body, he is hovering, uncertain, between life and death.

enjoy privileges among the gods in the heavenly sphere? These meditations of the man are structured as a dialogue between him and his *ba*. (In scholarly language, the *ba* plays the role of the man's alter ego.) However, the exchanges between the man and his *ba* do not follow a clear conceptual or logical progression. In the debate between them one can discern conflicts and contradictions that characterize the thoughts of a person in great pain and distress.¹⁷ Notwithstanding, in general two opposing approaches to the phenomenon of death present themselves: the man represents the traditional dogmatic view, while the *ba* offers an outlook skeptical of that view. According to the man, preparations for death—the construction of a tomb, embalming, and the entrusting of an heir with responsibility for offering sacrifices to the deceased—are crucial for continued existence in the afterlife (33–55). Death symbolizes emancipation from earthly suffering. This view is captivatingly illustrated in the four poems that conclude the man's speech with a wonderful literary skill that makes them the climax of the work. These poems, which contrast the travails of life (the first and second poems, 86–130) with the bliss of death and the happy fate of the deceased in the afterlife (the third and fourth poems, 130–147), are nothing short of a hymn in praise of death:

Death is before me today,
 [Like] a sick man's recovery,
 Like going out-doors after detention.
 Death is before me today,
 Like the smell of myrrh,
 Like sitting under a sail on a windy day.
 Death is before me today,
 Like the smell of lotuses,
 Like sitting on the shore of drunkenness. (130–135)

The *ba*, in contrast, describes death as a fearsome and depressing state: "If you think of a burial it is a broken heart. It is bringing of tears by saddening a man. It is taking a man from his house, casting him on high ground. You will never go out to see the sun!" (56–60). In its opinion, there

17. The emotional state of the man in this Egyptian work is reminiscent of the attitude of the master in the Akkadian work *Dialogue of Pessimism*, in which he, consumed by bitterness and depression, contemplates following various courses of action and subsequently reconsiders. For Alasdair Livingstone's translation, see *COS* 1.155:495–96.

is no point to preparing for death; the fate of all humanity is the same. There is no difference between a poor man lacking a grave and a rich one with a magnificent tomb, since all tombs are eventually destroyed and the bodies of their owners cast on the banks of the Nile (60–65). Therefore, no recourse remains for a person but to enjoy life in the present: “Follow the happy day [i.e., make holiday] and forget worry” (68).¹⁸ The *ba* reinforces its position by invoking two parables. The moral of the first is clear: a life full of suffering and distress is preferable to the bitter fate of those who were never born (68–80).

Similar statements are found in the Harper’s Songs, which date to the Middle Kingdom period and which were sung at banquets and funerals.¹⁹ They, too, express skepticism as to the efficacy of preparations for the afterlife: tombs are destroyed, the cult of the dead does not endure, and, chiefly, no one returns from the land of the dead to strengthen the hope of the living.²⁰ The expression used by the *ba*, “follow the happy day,” is the motto of the Harper’s Songs, and it gives voice to an ideology that sees a life of pleasure as the correct mode of earthly existence.²¹

18. A call to enjoy life’s pleasures can already be found in early wisdom texts (Instruction of Ptahhotep 186–189; Instruction Addressed to Merikare 58, 80; cf. Admonitions 8:5–7). But in the Dispute, it arises for the first time from casting doubt on the belief in the afterlife; see Stefan Fischer, *Die Aufforderungen zur Lebensfreude im Buch Kohelet und seine Rezeption der ägyptischen Harfnerlieder*, WAS 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 128.

19. Contra Michael V. Fox, “A Study of Antef,” *Or* 46 (1977): 393–423, who argues that one of the songs, the Antef, was composed in the Amarna period.

20. Cf. “The Song of the Tomb of King Intef” (Eleventh Dynasty), *AEL* 1:196–97. Doubts as to the effectiveness of a tomb and pyramid, which eventually disintegrate and are lost, is also expressed in the Ramesside Papyrus Chester Beatty 4. See below, n. 21.

21. Similar calls to enjoy life appear on tombstones from later periods, e.g., the inscription of the priest of Amun, Nebneteru (ca. 850 BCE) (*AEL* 3:18–24) and the monument of Taimhotep, wife of the high priest of Ptah in Memphis (ca. 100 BCE) (*AEL* 3:62–63). For parallels in the book of Ecclesiastes, see Eccl 3:12, 22; 9:7–9; 11:9–10. Cf. Epic of Gilgamesh 10.iii, translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 90). Skepticism as to the efficacy of tombs and the cult of the dead as a means to ensure continued existence in the afterlife is also expressed in the Ramesside Papyrus Chester Beatty 4, verso 2.5–3.10; 6.11–14; see Nili Shupak, “‘Canon’ and ‘Canonization’ in Ancient Egypt,” *BO* 58 (2001): 537–38. Cf. also the Babylonian “Poem about the Early Rulers” in Wilfred G. Lambert, “Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. J. Day et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38–42.

The Dispute concludes with an apparent compromise between the parties. The *ba* agrees to stay with the man until his natural death arrives, and they “will make harbor together.” But this is in fact a victory for the traditional-dogmatic conception of the man over the skeptical and rebellious spirit of the *ba*, which embodies both heresy and refreshing originality. This spirit will continue to gain traction and will leave its imprint on the Harper's Songs, burial inscriptions, and even on the didactic literature from the New Kingdom and later periods.

Conversation with the Heart versus Conversation/Argument with the Soul

In the three examples given in speculative wisdom literature of a person's conversation with his heart or his soul, the circumstances are the same. A person harmed by various disasters afflicting the land reaches a material and emotional nadir, feeling alone and helpless after losing faith in those closest to him. He is left with no option but to turn to his heart or soul, which will serve as his companion and share in the burden of his suffering. This role is filled by the heart in The Prophecies of Neferti, and the willful heart of Khakheperre-sonb is meant to perform this function as well. The role of the *ba* in the Dispute is no different from that of the heart in the two other works: the *ba* gives ear to the man's complaints, responds, and advises him.

The substitution of the heart for the soul is almost certainly due to the content of the works. Although all these compositions relate to contemporary societal ills, The Prophecies of Neferti and The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb address the dismal state of the earth in the here and now while envisioning a better earthly future. Not so the protagonist of The Dispute between a Man and His Ba, who views the alleviation of suffering as occurring only through death and in the afterlife. In the first two compositions, which focus on earthly life, the heart appears as a potential interlocutor of the person. Indeed, we have seen that the heart plays a central part in the judgment of the dead, the intermediate stage between death and the afterlife, but it has no active role in the person's existence in the hereafter. The *ba*, by contrast, is central to the continued existence of the person in the afterlife: it represents the deceased, and through it he can continue to undertake diverse physical activities, the most important of which is the ability to move back and forth between the tomb and the circle of the gods in the heaven. It therefore stands to reason that this

unique conversation between the man and his soul occurs specifically in the Dispute, a work whose focus is death and the afterlife.

Do Parallel Patterns Appear in the Wisdom Tradition of the Bible?

The three Egyptian works that feature conversation with the heart or soul exhibit a close affinity to the biblical wisdom literature, visible in their structure, style, terminology, and content. Having discussed this subject at length elsewhere, I will be content here to enumerate several significant commonalities.²²

(1) Social criticism—The author of Proverbs protests against society's leaders (Prov 29:2, 4, 12; cf. 29:14), Agur son of Jakeh bewails the corruption of his generation (30:11–14), and the proverbs of Alukah recount intolerable societal phenomena (30:21–23). Similarly, Job enumerates in chapter 24 the social ills of his time, and Qoheleth laments the oppressed who have no one to comfort them (Eccl 4:1) and the disappearance of justice and righteousness (3:16; 5:7).

(2) A desire for death and doubt as to the value of life—Job, like the man “who is tired of life,” wishes for death and is disgusted with existence (3:3–26, esp. vv. 21–22; 10:18–19; 13:15; 14:13).

(3) The opposite, skepticism vis-à-vis the fate of humans after death, is expressed by the *ba* (and in the Harper's Songs). Qoheleth also casts doubt on the common view of a person's destiny after death (Eccl 3:18–22).

(4) Nothing is left for humanity but pleasure—this is the message of the *ba*, and Qoheleth likewise prescribes happiness in life and works that lead to pleasure (Eccl 9:7–9; see also 2:24; 3:12, 22; 11:9–10).

(5) The undeserved downfall of a decent man—this motif forms the setting of the Dispute, and it also constitutes the central axis of the book of Job.

(6) A desire to reveal or author new statements—This is a noteworthy characteristic of Khakheperre-sonb (recto 2–3), and the spirit of searching and contemplation defines Qoheleth as well: “Not only was Qoheleth a sage himself, but he taught the people knowledge, weighing and searching and fashioning many proverbs” (12:9).²³

22. For a comprehensive discussion, see Shupak, “Egyptian ‘Prophetic’ Writings,” 81–102.

23. Nili Shupak, “The Terminology of Biblical Wisdom Literature as a Tool for the Reconstruction of Learning Methods in Ancient Israel,” VT 53 (2003): 422–23.

In light of these common features, the question arises again: Is there a parallel in the biblical wisdom literature to the Egyptian pattern of conversation with one's heart or soul? At first glance, no parallel to the Egyptian *ba* is possible in the language of the Bible, which expresses no belief in an afterlife.²⁴ Still, it seems that the use of the word "soul" (נפש) in the Bible in the sense of vital self, the individual's life, is close to that of the Egyptian term (e.g., Prov 8:36; Job 33:28).²⁵ The נפש, like the *ba*, exhibits physical appetites: it can be thirsty (Ps 42:3), hungry (Prov 27:7; cf. 23:2), and even has a sexual appetite (Jer 2:24). The נפש, which at times means also breath, distinguishes the living from the dead; when the נפש vacates the body, a person dies, as evidenced by phrases meaning "expire" and denoting death (נפח נפש [Jer 15:9] or צאת נפש [Gen 35:18]); conversely, the phrase נפש חיה, means "living being."²⁶ In Egyptian, the belief that if the soul (*ba*) does not stay with a person after his death he will die (a second death), as feared by the man who is tired of life, is somewhat similar. There is perhaps a superficial connection between the *ba*'s appearance as an interlocutor in Egyptian composition and the psalmist's comments to himself, "upon me my soul is cast down" (Ps 42:6–7) and "bless the LORD, O my soul" (Pss 103:1, 22; 104:1, 35).

Unlike the *ba*, which is unique to the Egyptian worldview, the term that denotes the heart in Egyptian, *ib/h3ty* has a semantic parallel in the language of the Bible: לב. The לב, like its parallel in Egyptian, is a polysemic term. Its various meanings as well as the phrases and vocabulary that accompany it, are strikingly similar to those in Egyptian literature.²⁷ In both Egyptian and Hebrew, the heart denotes the essence and focus of human life, but at the same time it is believed to be an independent entity. So, like the protagonists of the Egyptian speculative wisdom literature, the sage Qoheleth turns to his heart. The closest phrasing to that found

24. However, there are some hints to life beyond the grave (Ps 49:16) and to individual resurrection (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2); see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Ellis Brotzman, "Man and the Meaning of נפש," *BSac* 145 (1988): 400–409; Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors*, AIL 31 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 4–10.

25. See Horst Seebass, "נפש," *TDOT* 9:510–12.

26. נפש refers to breath also in 1 Kgs 17: 21–22 but appears only once in wisdom literature (Job 41:13).

27. For a comparative treatment of the heart in Egyptian and biblical literature, see Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found*, 297–311.

in Egyptian literature appears only once: “I communed [דברתי] with my heart, saying...” (Eccl 1:16). But here the heart has a passive role; there is no expectation that it will respond or act as it does in *The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb* or *The Prophecies of Neferti*.²⁸

A slight similarity to Egyptian style can be found also in the common phrases in *Ecclesiastes* “I said in my heart” and “I spoke in my heart” (2:1, 15; 3:17–18), meaning “I thought.” Here the heart appears as the seat of contemplation.²⁹ In similar instances in the book of *Ecclesiastes*, the heart does not function as a conversation partner but as a tool for understanding and learning: The phrases “and I set/applied [נתתי] my heart to know” (1:17; 8:16; cf. 8:9; 9:1) “and I set my heart to seek” (1:13; cf. 7:25) denote intellectual activities undertaken through the heart.³⁰

In light of these findings, it is not certain whether we can accept Humbert’s claim that the examples in the Bible are based on Egyptian models.³¹ I believe that in the Egyptian works and in their biblical counterparts one can discern a universal human phenomenon that knows neither time nor place. While being in a state of material or emotional distress, a person suffers, feeling alone and alienated from the society that surrounds him or her. Nothing is left over but to address one’s heart or soul, which can serve as a companion in a time of trouble.

In summary, the pattern of conversation between a man and his heart or soul is only a literary tool, a means that the Egyptian sages used to impart their message: even when a person has reached the very lowest point in life, one should never lose hope, for a better future will certainly come, whether through a redeemer-king who will restore order (*Prophecies* 58–71; perhaps also *Admonitions* 11.11–12.11) or through the freeing experience of death, the bridge from a life of earthly suffering to an eternal state of peace in the afterlife (*Dispute*).

28. In the Bible, the heart is granted only few times with the power of speech: It “utters perverse things” (Prov 23:33) and “says: ‘Thy face, LORD, do I seek’” (Ps 27:8).

29. Cf. “I mediate [אשיחה] within my heart” (Ps 77:7); also Pss 10:6; 14:1; in Job a person talks to himself without mentioning the heart or the soul (7:4; 9:27; 32:7).

30. Cf. the title of the *Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb*: “The quest of phrases with a searching heart [*ḥhy n ib*],” COS 1.44:104 n. 5.

31. Paul Humbert, *Recherches sur les sources égyptiennes de la littérature sapientiale d’Israël* (Neuchâtel: Secrétariat de l’Université, 1929), 108–9.

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Leviathan's Actions in Job 41:22–24

Ellen van Wolde

Job 40:25–41:26 presents an impressive picture of Leviathan, of his fierce posture, invincibility, awe-inspiring nature, and, finally, in 41:22–24, of his actions. However, almost every term in this last episode is difficult to understand. Most commentators offer an explanation of these items in light of the previous verses, reading 41:5–26 as one piece. For example, those who identify Leviathan with a crocodile (based on vv. 5–21) select in verse 22 the meaning of “jagged shards” for חרודי חרש and “threshing edge” for חרוץ and consider it a description of the crocodile’s underpart and of the track he leaves behind, while they understand מצולה (v. 23) to refer to the Nile.¹ Others argue that the picture of Leviathan is based on the whale, because Leviathan, like the whale, is a denizen of the sea and its depths, and they see verses 23–24 as a confirmation of the whalian interpretation of Leviathan because the whale alone can stir up the depths or whip up the abyss into a boiling froth (v. 23) or leave a white wake behind it (v. 24).² Still others consider Leviathan a dragon or

1. One of the earliest known scholars who identified Leviathan in Job 41 with the crocodile is Samuel Bochart, *Hierozaicon sive bipartitum opus de animalibus Sacrae Scripturae* (London: Thomas Rycroft, 1663), 5.769–95; it remains the consensus view until the present day. It is represented by, among others, Christoph Uehlinger, “Leviathan,” *DDD*, 956–64, who concludes: “No doubt this text [Job 41:2–26] describes features of a crocodile. ... But the crocodile-Leviathan ... is not simply considered as a zoological species. ... Yahweh’s own words are full of respect for the crocodile-Leviathan” (962). For an overview of Leviathan-crocodile scholarship, see David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, WBC 18B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 1143–44 and 1190–92.

2. The identification of Leviathan with the whale (or dolphin), was advocated early on by Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*, 1275, ad loc., but in the twentieth century only by Bernard D. Eerdmans, *Studies in Job* (Leiden: Burgersdijk & Niermans, 1939), and G. R. Driver, “Mythical Monsters in the Old Testament,” in *Studi*

similar mythological creature, partly based on Ugaritic parallels and on other biblical texts, as well as on the fire-breathing dragon in 41:10–13, represented in verses 23–24 by a Leviathan that makes the depths and the seas boil.³ A few scholars opt for a supernatural being or imaginary creature, so that Leviathan cannot be identified with a whale, dragon, crocodile, or any other known entity in the animal kingdom.⁴ Finally, Clines prefers an in-between position: “it seems best to see it as a real creature depicted with mythological features or overtones.”⁵

In this essay I will focus on verses 22–24 and analyze its components linguistically, in order to avoid a reading that is based on and limited by a previously construed picture of Leviathan. In it I will return to the arguments provided by the scholars mentioned above to support their respective crocodilian, whalian, dragonian, or imaginary pictures of Leviathan and consider whether or not the components in Job 41:22–24 support their positions. But my main goal is to offer an in-depth analysis of these verses’ items. My conclusion will be that these verses’ components do not fit in with the common idea of Leviathan as a crocodile, dragon, or whale.

This study is made to honor Ed Greenstein, who is never satisfied with standard answers but keeps an open mind to explore texts in the Hebrew Bible anew, based on a profound and broad knowledge. Thus he has been able to create ever-new perspectives on biblical texts in general and on the book of Job in particular. We warmly welcome his new translation of the book of Job,⁶ and I hope to show that his evaluation, that “translations of

Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1956), 234–38, who considers Leviathan a whale only in Job 40:25–30; the rest of 40:15–41:26 he assigns to a crocodile. Recently the Leviathan whale identification was defended by Michael V. Fox, “Behemoth and Leviathan,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 261–67.

3. The Septuagint translates Leviathan with a “dragon” (δράκων). Clines summarizes (*Job* 38–42, 1191): “The mythological interpretation of Leviathan seems to have first been argued by Gunkel (*Schöpfung und Chaos*, 18–58). ... It is adopted in the commentaries of Tur-Sinai, Weiser (261–263), Pope, and Habel, as well as by Day, *God’s Conflict*, and A. Caquot, ‘Le Léviathan de Job 40,25–41,26,’ *RB* 99.”

4. Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, AB 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973); and Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 361.

5. Clines, *Job* 38–42, 1911.

6. Edward L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation* (New York: Yale University, Press 2019).

Job often follow a convention that has not undergone sufficient critical scrutiny;⁷ is valid for Job 41:22–24, too.

The Nominal Clause in Job 41:22a

Verse 22a is a nominal clause that has been interpreted in two ways. Some scholars take תחתיו as a noun and translate with “his underpart is...,”⁸ whereas others consider it a preposition “under him is...”⁹ From a lexical perspective it is quite clear that תחת in all its 512 occurrences is a preposition marking a spatial positioning “under x,” never a noun designating someone’s or something’s underpart. However, those who choose for the noun option do so because they regard the word חרש to denote a potsherd and the nominal clause to be a description of Leviathan’s belly, while they take Leviathan to be a crocodile. But even if Leviathan is imagined here as a crocodile, it must be noticed that a (Nile) crocodile does not have sharp, “potsherd-like” scrubs or points on his belly, but only on his back and tail. In verse 22a, תחתיו functions as a preposition that indicates the place of חרש and חדודי in relation to Leviathan: “Under him are [some things].”

The noun חרש occurs seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible: seven times in collocation with כלי “vessel of earthenware,” where it denotes an earthen vessel in which one puts food, water, blood, wine, or a document (for safekeeping). Without כלי it is used ten times to denote earthenware, earthen pots, or pottery made of clay. An analysis of these attestations shows the following results.

In Isa 30:13–14 חרש is used in a metaphorical context in which sin is compared to a break in the wall that will cause it to collapse, and the collapsing wall is compared to the breaking of a potter’s jar, “so that there will

7. Edward L. Greenstein, “Challenges in Translating the Book of Job,” in *Found in Translation: Essays on Jewish Biblical Translation in Honor of Leonard J. Greenspoon*, ed. James W. Barker, Anthony Le Donne, and Joel N. Lohr (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018), 182.

8. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978); Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1995); John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). See also the NJPS translation of Job 41:22: “His underpart is jagged shards.”

9. Eduard Dhorme, *A Commentary to the Book of Job* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 642; Clines, *Job* 38–42, 137.

not be found in its pieces a **חרש** to take fire from the hearth or scoop water from a cistern.”¹⁰ Can one scoop water from a cistern with a potsherd? Or take fire from a hearth with a broken piece of pottery? It seems most unlikely. The reason why commentators choose to translate it “potsherd” lies in the fact that they connect it with the described actions of smashing or crashing in verse 14a, assuming that this would result in earthenware broken into pieces. However, verse 14b does not connect the **חרש** to the previously described actions in 14a but to the infinitives **לחתות** “to take fire from a hearth”¹¹ and **לחשף** “to scoop water with from a cistern.”¹² Hence the term **חרש** must designate a pot or vessel.

Isaiah 45:9 uses the noun **חרש** twice: “Shame on him who argues with his potter, though he is nothing but a pot of earthen pottery [**חרש את-חרשי**]” [אדמה].” In this context **חרש** denotes an earthen pot, with the implicit reference to Gen 2:7, where God formed the human being from soil, אדמה. Humans are not metaphorically understood as potsherds or shards but are compared to earthen pots made by their maker, the potter.

Jeremiah 19:1 describes how the prophet is sent out to buy “a jug of potter’s ware [**בבקבך יוצר חרש**]”, which cannot be a shard but an entire pot made of clay that is formed by a potter.

In Ezek 23:34 YHWH says to Oholibah that she will drink and drain the cup of Samaria and “that she will break its pottery.” The verb **גרם** means “break” or “crash,” and it is unlikely the text is imagining the breaking of an already-broken shard but rather a complete earthen vessel that will be broken. This explains why dictionaries and translations that take **חרש** to mean a shard change the meaning of **גרם** into “to gnaw,” as in “to gnaw its shards,” which seems highly unlikely. The text speaks about breaking the pots that Oholibah had drained.

The attestation of **חרש** in Prov 26:23 is used in the description of a shining cover laid over pottery: “base silver laid over earthenware are ardent lips with an evil mind” (NJPS). The *pual* participle **מצפה** (from **צפה**) designates “be overlaid with,” used here in Prov 26:23 in refer-

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

11. The verb used in Isa 30:14 is **חתה** “to take away”; this verb occurs four times in the Hebrew Bible, of which three occur in relation to (coals of) fire (Isa 30:14; Prov 6:27; 25:22) and once in Ps 52:7 denoting “to destroy a person,” which may or may not imply the meaning of fire. The noun **מחתה** (33x) denotes a firepan.

12. The verb **חשף** (twice in the Hebrew Bible) designates “to scoop up water from a cistern” (Isa 30:14) or “to skim off fifty measures (out of a wine vat)” (Hag 2:16).

ence to earthenware covered with silver and in the Temple Scroll (11QT 36:11) in reference to doors covered with gold. The comparison made in Proverbs is that you can cover something ordinary like pottery with shining silver, and so also can you cover an evil heart with ardent lips, but it will not help you, because the glitter and glamour of the outside does not correspond with the inside. For our discussion, the importance lies in the construction: the passive participle *מצפה* expresses the result of previous actions: the silver was laid over the earthenware some time before, and the result is a shining silver appearance (likewise gold in 11QT XXXVI, 11).

A similar usage can be detected in Lam 4:1–2: “Alas! The gold is dulled, debased the finest gold! ... The precious children of Zion; Once valued as gold—Alas, they are accounted as earthen pots, Work of a potter’s hands!” (NJPS). Again the opposition between earthenware and precious metals is sketched: whereas gold is highly valued, earthen pots are nothing special; they are everyday utensils. Once again Gen 2:7 is lurking in the background, with humans compared to pots made by the potter. In Lam 4:2 the children of Zion were once like precious pots valued as gold, but now they are simply regarded earthen pots.

Although in all these usages of *חרש* the term clearly denotes an earthen pot, pottery, or earthenware, the same term is commonly understood in Job 2:8 and in 41:22 to denote a “potsherd.” The concept of potsherd includes the notion of a piece of broken earthenware. In biblical scholarship the explanation of *חרש* as a potsherd in Job 41:2 is based on references to Isa 30:13–14, discussed above, and on Job 2:8.¹³ The reason why exegetes and translators of Job 2:8 opt for the exceptional meaning of potsherd is its combination with the verb *התגרד*, which is understood as a *hithpael* of *גרד*, “to scratch, scrape.” Since one cannot scratch with a pot, it should thus denote a potsherd. The meaning of the verb *התגרד* (*hithpael* of *גרד*) is uncertain because it is a *hapax legomenon*. The only other attestation of the Hebrew verb *גרד* (in the *hiphil*) is in 11QT IL, 12:; “And on the day when they bring out the deceased from it, they shall clean the house of all tarnishing through oil and wine and moisture of water. Its floor and its walls and its doors they *shall scrape off* and its door locks and its doorposts and its thresholds and its lintels they shall wash down

13. For an extensive analysis of Job 2:8, see Ellen van Wolde, “The Problem of the Potsherd: Job 2:8 in a New Perspective,” *OTE* 31 (2018): 692–704.

with water.”¹⁴ In this text, the door, the wall, and the floor are the indirect objects of the *hiphil* verb, whereas the dirt, the impure matter that is to be removed, is absent as a direct object. Apparently, “one scrapes off” and not “one scrapes [something] off.” Also in Mishnaic Hebrew, in Jewish Aramaic, and in Syriac comparable verbs denote “to scrape/scrape off.”¹⁵ The Septuagint further elaborates that Job was scraping away pus, an interpretation with which the Vulgate concurs.¹⁶ It seems likely, therefore, that the *hithpael* התגרד in Job 2:8 designates either the action “to scratch himself” or “to scrape away.” The term שחין is used here to denote “inflammations,” “sores,” or “ulcers,” and it is used thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible to refer to pestilence as one of the plagues (Exod 9:9, 10, 11 [2x]; Deut 28:27, 35), where it describes the inflammation that breaks out in boils on the bodies of the Egyptians, to leprosy (Lev 13:18, 19, 20, 23) pictured as an inflammation on the skin, and in 2 Kgs 20:7 and Isa 38:21 to the severe illness of Hezekiah. In all these occurrences, the notion of a skin disease in combination with inflammation characterizes its meaning. To scratch such boils because they are itching is highly unlikely because that would spread the inflammation. More likely is that one squeezes the pus out of the inflamed ulcers in order to disinfect them, that is, to wash them out so that the healing process is sped up. The *hithpael* התגרד in Job 2:8 expresses that Job performs this action on himself. Subsequently, the discharge or secretion can be collected in a pot. The application of the verb גרד is quite similar to the only other attestation of the term in the Temple Scroll, where the verb גרד in the *hiphil* is used without a direct object: the stripping off does not mark the matter that is stripped off, but only the action of

14. Translation from Johann Maier, *The Temple Scroll: An Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, trans. R. T. White, JSOTSup 34 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 43, emphasis added.

15. In Mishnaic Hebrew, גרד means “to scrape, scratch, comb, or strip” or, as a passive participle, “stripped” (Jastrow, 1:265; b. Shabb. 109b: “which has been stripped of its rind from the top downward”). In Jewish Aramaic (e.g., in Tg. Ps.-J. Judg 8:16, where it occurs in the *paal* (גרד) and in Syriac it means “to scrape” or “to scrub (off),” or, less specifically, “to drag (something) across (something).” The Peshitta of Job 2:8 uses *mtgrdw* in the *ithpaal*: *wnsb lh ḥṣp’ lmtgrdw bh* “and he [Job] took for himself the potsherd (in order) to scrape against/on himself.” In a Christian Palestinian Aramaic (Syriac) manuscript for Job 7:5 the same verb shows up in a *paal* (G) form: “I dissolve (?) the clods of earth from the pus I scrape off [break in manuscript].”

16. C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 304.

removal or forcing out. In short, the *hithpael* התגרד in combination with the preposition בו “in it” leads to the following translation of Job 2:8: “he took a pot to scrape away (the pus) in it.” So the standard meaning of pot or vessel for כרש stands up to reason in Job 2:8, too. In sum, the noun כרש designates in all its attestations in the Hebrew Bible “earthen pot, pottery or earthenware.” I propose, therefore, to take כרש in Job 41:22a to designate earthenware, earthen pot, or pottery and not a potsherd.

The word חדוד is a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible. The only other usage of חדוד is 1QNoah (1Q19) 3 5, חדודי השמש, which tells of Noah's birth and his striking appearance and radiant eyes: “They [his eyes] illuminated the rooms of the house like *rays of the sun*.”¹⁷ In this text reference is made not only to Noah's radiant eyes but also to other characteristics, such as his white hair, which is associated with radiance and illumination. The plural of חדוד “rays” or “beams of light” that stream from the sun or any luminous body. If חדודי designates a similar meaning in Job 41:22a, the term would refer to the “rays” of earthen pots or to “radiant earthenware,” entailing such notions as spreading of light or heat.

The morphological form חדוד in Job 41:22 suggests that it is a noun constructed from the passive participle of the verb חדד. This verb occurs six times in the Hebrew Bible: once it is used in the *qal* to denote “be quick” (Hab 1:8: “a horse is quicker than a wolf”), twice in the *hiphil* to denote “sharpen” (in Prov 27:17: “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens the face of another”), and three times in the *hophal* to denote “be sharpened” of a sword (Ezek 21:14, 15, 16). In these occurrences the combination of the verb with a particular noun determines its meaning: in conjunction with an animal it seems to denote quickness, with a weapon it means to sharpen, while with a face its meaning remains unclear. But here in Job 41:22a it is used in conjunction with earthenware. If חדודי functions as a nominal derived from a participle passive, it would express the result of

17. See Matthias Weingold, “Aramaic Wunderkind: The Birth of Noah in the Aramaic Texts of Qumran,” in *Aramaica Qumranica: Proceedings of the Conference on Aramaic Texts from Qumran in Aix-en-Provence 30 June–2 July 2008*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, STDJ 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 299–315, esp. 303; James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 218–19; William Loader, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 289.

a previous action performed by Leviathan, so that the clause would read: “under him is rayed/sharpened earthenware” or “under him is earthenware made radiant.” If *חֲדָדִי* functions as a simple noun it would read: “under him are beams of light (shining on) earthenware.”

In order to determine the meaning of the entire clause in verse 22a, we must return to the texts containing the same noun *חֲדָדִי* and also a participle passive: Prov 26:23 and 11QT XXXVI, 11. In the former text, silver was laid over earthenware, presumably to make it more shining and glamorous, although the main intention of the proverb was to express that this silver cover cannot hide the common substance of clay or soil of the pottery, just as ardent lips cannot hide an evil heart. The idea behind it is that silver was laid over earthenware to make it radiant and thus more precious. Also in 11QT XXXVI, 11 the doors that were covered with gold are made this way to make them glimmer and shine. Could this help us to construe the correct meaning of Job 41:22?

The situation expressed in this nominal clause is either a state or the effect of Leviathan’s actions: he spread rays of light over earthenware, that is, over the common, everyday material of earthenware, so that it became radiant (even though in ordinary life it is impossible to let earthenware shine). Therefore, I propose the following provisional translation: “under him are rays/beams of light (shining on) earthenware,” or “under him is radiant earthenware,” or even “under him earthenware is made radiant/shining.” The next parallel clause in verse 22b may give us further information.

The Verbal Clause in Job 41:22b

The verbal clause in v. 22b describes Leviathan’s action. The verb *רָפַד* is used only three times in the Hebrew Bible: Job 17:13; 41:22; and Song 2:5. In Job 17:13 “my bed” is the direct object of *רָפַד*, and the terms together express the preparation of one’s bed. The word “spread out” or “cover” implies that one places or spreads something out over something else in order to prepare, protect, hide, or embellish it. In Job 17:13 the equipment with which the bed is covered is not mentioned.

In Song 2:5b “me” is the direct object of *רָפַד*, “cover me with apples.” This is parallel with verse 5a, “lay raisin cakes upon me” or “sustain me with raisin cakes,” in which the verb *סָמַךְ* expresses either the more figurative meaning of “to support, sustain” (commonly used in combination with abstract concepts such as trust, the righteous, the mind)

or the more concrete meaning of “to lay on” or “to set on” (used with a hand, a garment, etc.). In Song 2:5b both options are possible, but because the context is that of a physical body, the nonfigurative option is preferable. The parallelism would then be “lay raisin cakes upon me and cover me with apples,” in which the word “cover” is used to indicate that this disposition is made in order to prepare or embellish the loved one’s body.¹⁸

Based on this small amount of data, and especially on the text of Job 17:13, we can conclude that the verb רָפַד in Job 41:22 designates “to spread out” or “to cover,” while the notion of covering includes three parties: someone (the subject) who covers someone/something (direct object) with something else (complement). Here, in Job 41:22, these three positions are all filled in: Leviathan is said to cover טִיט with חֲרוֹץ.

The word טִיט occurs thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible and clearly denotes mud or mire. It is located in the streets,¹⁹ or in a pit,²⁰ while mire and slime (רָפַשׁ and יִיִן) and mud (טִיט) are used as synonyms.²¹ In Isa 41:25 טִיט is related to the clay from which a potter makes earthen pots. Syntactically, the noun טִיט is most often used with the preposition ב “in” (Nah 3:14: “in the mud”; Zech 10:5: “trample in the mud”; Jer 38:6: “sink in the mud”) and twice with “out” (Pss 40:3; 69:15), whereas Job 41:22 is the only text in which טִיט is combined with עָלֵי “over.”

The term חֲרוֹץ is not as simple. According to the dictionaries it stands for “gold” (six times), “threshing sledge” (four times), and “canal, moat”

18. Another text that is of relevance for the present discussion is Judg 4:18, where Sisera fled to the tent of Jael (“He entered her tent and she covered him with a blanket”), in which the verb כָּסָה “cover” has a person as direct object and the blanket (שְׁמִיכָה) with ב-*instrumentalis* indicates the equipment with which Sisera is covered. The similarity between this noun שְׁמִיכָה (written with ש) and the verb סָמַד (written with ס) “to spread out” may point to their relation in meaning: both are used in reference to blankets or bedcovers.

19. 2 Sam 22:43: “I pounded them like dust of the earth; like mud of the streets I pulverized them”; Ps 18:43: “I trod them flat as mud in the streets”; Mic 7:10: “she shall be for trampling like mud in the streets”; Zech 9:3: “she [Tyre] has amassed ... gold like the mud in the streets”; 10:5: “they shall be like warriors in battle, trampling in the mud of the streets.”

20. Jer 38:6: “in the pit there was no water only mud.”

21. Isa 57:20: “his waters toss up mire and mud”; Ps 40:3: “He lifted me out of the miry pit, the slimy mud.”

(once)²² in the Hebrew Bible.²³ The four attestations of חרוץ as “threshing sledge” are the following. Amos 1:3 (“Because of their threshing [of] Gilead with threshing boards of iron”) contains the plural of חרוץ together with the infinitive of דוש “their threshing” plus the direct object Gilead. In Isa 28:27 (“so black cumin is not threshed with a threshing board בחרון, and the wheel of the threshing sledge is not moved over the cumin”) the singular of חרוץ is used in combination with the verb דוש (thresh) and parallel to the next clause describing the movement of a threshing sledge, עגלה, with respect to the same object: cumin. Also in Isa 41:15 (“I will make you into a threshing board [מורג], a new thresher [חרון] with many spikes; you shall thresh [דוש] mountains to dust”), the noun חרוץ is used in combination with the verb דוש and in parallel construction with מורג, threshing board. These three texts mention objects and tools that fit in the threshing process, and the noun חרוץ clearly functions in this threshing context. But does Job 41:22 display a similar context of threshing? The object is טיט, mud or mire, which is not something that can normally be threshed.²⁴ In addition, the verb רפד “spread out” or “cover” seems illogical in combination with a threshing sledge. These two arguments make it unlikely that חרוץ designates a threshing board or edge in Job 41:22. In other words, none of the usual verbs set in combination with threshing (דוש, מורג) are used here, and the verb that occurs cannot be used together with a threshing board.

Six times in the Hebrew Bible the word חרוץ designates “gold”: Zech 9:3; Ps 68:14; Prov 3:14; 8:10, 19; 16:16. Also the two occurrences of the lexeme in the Hebrew of Ben Sira clearly mean “gold” (14:3; 31:5).

22. Because of its single usage in Dan 9:25 denoting “moat” or “canal,” it will be left out of the discussion here.

23. BDB (358b) recognizes חרוץ only as an adjective “sharp,” with מורג “threshing sledge” implied here and in Isa 28:27 and Amos 1:3. Clines (*Job* 38–42, 1198) concludes: “Imagining its nether parts as a threshing sledge fitted with sharp potsherds, the poet envisages how it will leave a deep imprint as it walks away from lying in a comfortable spot in the mud.”

24. The identification of Leviathan with the crocodile has led many commentators to select the meaning of “threshing edge.” Together with the idea that the term חרש denotes a potsherd, they take v. 22b to refer to the track a crocodile leaves in the sand or mud. However, the track a real crocodile leaves in the sand is not at all comparable to the pattern that African or Arabic threshing edges (old and recent ones) leave in the sand. What a crocodile leaves are foot impressions, whereas a threshing plough leaves a kind of network structure.

In Zech 9:3 חרוץ refers to Tyre's behavior: "she has amassed silver like dust and gold [חרוץ] like mud [בטיט] in the streets." We find here the same combination of words as in Job 41:22, in which gold and mud figure side by side. In Ps 68:14 ("Even for those of you who lie among the sheepfolds, there are wings of a dove sheathed in silver, its pinions in fine gold חרוץ") the contrast made is that between the poor shepherds, on the one hand, and the silver and gold-covered pigeons, on the other hand. In the book of Proverbs the term חרוץ is used primarily in comparisons: Prov 3:14 describes the value of wisdom ("her value in trade is better than silver, her yield greater than gold"), 8:10 the value of knowledge ("accept my discipline rather than silver, knowledge rather than choice gold"), 8:19 the value of products ("my fruit is better than gold and my produce better than choice silver"), and 16:16 the value of wisdom ("how much better to acquire wisdom than gold, to acquire understanding is preferable to silver"). So in six texts חרוץ designates gold, while these texts share the same characteristics: silver and gold are mentioned side by side, representing sumptuousness. In three texts they are contrasted with mud as the representative of the lowest of all material sorts or with shepherds as the representatives of the poorest of all people.

Because of the lack of terms referring to the threshing process and because of the great similarity with the usages of חרוץ in the Hebrew Bible where it is contrasted with "poor" or "low" substances, it seems highly likely that חרוץ designates "gold" in Job 41:22. Therefore, I propose to translate verse 22b with "he spread gold out over mud" or "he covered mud with gold."

The conclusion for the entire verse is that the nominal clause in verse 22a expresses a state/quality or the result of a previous action that is spatially related to Leviathan, while the parallel verbal clause in verse 22b narrates Leviathan's ongoing action. Both clauses designate a similar content: Leviathan spreads light under him that makes earthenware glitter as though illuminated by rays of the sun, and Leviathan covers mud with gold.

Job 41:23–24

Verse 23 consists of two parallel verbal clauses, of which only the term מצולה needs discussion, because the meanings of the verbs רתח ("to boil") and שים ("to set" or "make") and of the noun סיר ("cooking pot," "cauldron") are clear. The twelve texts with מצולה in the Hebrew Bible indicate

that it is used in reference to the waters of the deep, of the sea, or of Sheol and designates “depth” or “the deep.” It is often set parallel to the sea, as is also the case here in verse 23. However, based on Ps 69:3 (בִּיּוֹן מְצוּלָה: “slimy deep”) and on Zech 10:11 (מְצוּלוֹת יָאֵר: “the depths of the river”), various biblical scholars conclude that in Job 41:23 מְצוּלָה also refers to the Nile and see it as a confirmation of the crocodilian interpretation of Leviathan. This seems unlikely for three reasons. First, one should consider the large majority of the other attestations of מְצוּלָה where it designates the deep sea. Second, this is further buttressed by the parallel construction with יָם in 23b. Third, a comparison with Zech 10:11 and Ps 69:3 is illustrative. The former refers back to the exodus story and the crossing of the sea; where Exod 15:5 uses מְצוּלָה parallel to תְּהוֹם, Zechariah speaks of a “passover” (עֶבֶר) through the sea and states that “all the deeps of the river will dry up.” Hence this text does not refer only to the river itself but to the deep out of which the river gets its water. Psalm 69:2–3 (“Deliver me, o God, for the waters have reached my neck; I am sinking into the slimy deep and find no place to stand”) depicts being in waters without having a foothold, while the adjective בִּיּוֹן refers to the slimy character of the water, but it says nothing of it being a swamp. Instead, it refers to deep waters that are opaque. This view is confirmed by Ps 40:3 (“He lifted me out of the miry pit, out of the slimy mud [מְטִיט הַיִּין]), where “slimy mud” does not refer to a swamp but to the opaque and dirty nature of the mud. In sum, in all its twelve occurrences מְצוּלָה denotes “the deep,” and the verbal clause expresses that Leviathan causes the deep to “boil like a cooking pot.”

The parallel clause in verse 23b tells the same, namely, that Leviathan “makes the sea [boil] like an ointment pot.” The verb רָקַח (eight times in the Hebrew Bible to designate “mix ointment”) and various nouns built on the root רָקַח denote “ointment maker,” “spice,” “ointment mixture,” while מְרַקְחָה refers to the ointment pot in which one makes, mixes, and stirs up ointment. Both clauses presuppose fire or heat. Leviathan’s heat is such that it makes the deep and the sea boil.

Verse 24a is a verbal clause that opens with the preposition אַחֲרָיו “behind him” (cf. “under him” in v. 22a) and in which the *hiphil* אֹרֵן expresses that Leviathan “causes to light”: “Behind him he illuminates/lights up a path” or “Behind him he leaves a shining wake.”

The next verbal clause, verse 24b, is quite remarkable because it contains the *qal* of חָשַׁב (“to think, consider”) and unexpectedly introduces an external viewpoint and evaluating agent: “one would think the תְּהוֹם

white-haired” or “he makes the deep seem white-haired.”²⁵ The noun **שיבה** refers to gray/white hair, always used in the Hebrew Bible in reference to people of old age but here uniquely used with reference to the **תהום**. This metaphorical usage reminds us of the luminous rays of Noah in 1QNoah 3 5 that are associated with his eyes and with his white hair, but also reminds us of Dan 7:9–10:

As I looked on, Thrones were set in place, And the Ancient of Days took His seat. His garment was like white snow, And the hair of His head was like lamb's wool. His throne was tongues of flame; its wheels were blazing fire. A river of fire streamed forth before Him; Thousands upon thousands served Him; Myriads upon myriads attended Him. (NJPS)

In these texts “white hair” is a metaphor connected with old age as well as radiance. Could the same notions be applicable to the **תהום** in Job 41:24b? A first argument in support of this view is the parallelism of verse 24a (“he lightens his wake”) and 24b (“he seems to make the **תהום** white-haired”), which both regard the light-giving capacity of Leviathan. Another argument is Leviathan's triple action in verses 23–24 concerning the waters: he makes the sea and the deep boil and makes the **תהום** radiant with light. The action narrated in verse 24a tells of the trail he leaves behind: a wake of light. This power of illumination is so great that it seems as though Leviathan makes the waters of the **תהום** shining brilliant white.

Conclusion: Leviathan's Actions in Job 41:22–24

The components of verses 22–24 paint a coherent picture of Leviathan. He illuminates the solid matter that covers the earth and makes the waters of the deep boil, even though the deep descends so far vertically. He causes the waters of the sea to boil, waters that cover the entire horizontal area of the earth-disk and surround the continent. In other words, Leviathan's actions concern all matter, both earthly substance as well as the terranean and subterranean waters. In opposition to the scholars who consider Leviathan a sea animal, one should say that his actions do not regard the waters only but also relate to the soil. He makes the mud and the pots made of earthenware shine and glitter as if covered with light and gold. He heats

25. KJV, RSV, NIV, and Clines (*Job* 38–42, 1195) choose the former translation, NJPS the latter translation.

the waters below the earth-disk and the seas on it, causing them to boil like ointment in bubbling ointment pots. He apparently has a fire inside him that makes water boil and the soil dry up and shine. His heat and fire are of such an immense power that even the deep seems glowing white.

Based on these results, I propose the following translation:

- 22 Under him are beams of light shining on earthenware;
he spreads gold over the mud.
- 23 He makes the deep boil like a cauldron,
he makes the sea boil like an ointment-pot.
- 24 Behind him he leaves a shining wake,
one would think the deep glowing white.

In sum, the actions described in Job 41:22–24 do not confirm Leviathan's identification with the crocodile, the dragon, or the whale. The Leviathan is depicted here as an impressive animal that makes solid material shine and waters boil. His light- and heat-emanating power is so great that he can heat up the entire earth, sea and deep. Identification with an ordinary animal is, therefore, impossible, and there is no reason to even try. The intention of this episode is to picture Leviathan's otherworldly actions and to leave Job and his readers awestruck.

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Studies in Biblical Reception and Exegesis

A New Approach to the Canonization of the Hebrew Bible: The Case of Chronicles, Not Contested Yet Not Cited Often

Pamela Barmash

The canonization of the Hebrew Bible remains a puzzle, and we must ask whether the approaches taken so far to solve it have led to an impasse. Scholars have focused on the books that were controversial: the Song of Songs, Qoheleth, and Ezekiel. But it is worth considering whether another approach, one starting from the opposite direction, might be more effective. Delving into the main pieces of evidence for the controversy and then taking the book of Chronicles as a test case, I examine why Chronicles was *not* controversial while other books were when they shared analogous problematic characteristics. Strikingly, there is a paucity of references to Chronicles in Jewish Hellenistic sources, ancient Jewish art, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic tradition, yet it was still included in the canon. Analyzing how Chronicles was not disputed may clarify the nature of canonization, and reflecting on why a seldom-referenced work was included in the canon at all opens a window into the complexity and nuance of the place of the Bible in Jewish culture.

The Process of Canonization

Was there a decisive moment at which books were included or excluded from Scripture? A text identified as the key to the canonization of the Hebrew Bible is m. Yad. 3:5:

It is a great honor to present this study as a contribution to a Jubilee volume celebrating Edward L. Greenstein, a scholar and teacher of the highest distinction and a dear friend.

All the Holy Scriptures defile the hands. The Song of Songs and Qoheleth defile the hands.

Rabbi Judah says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands, but about Qoheleth there is dissension.

Rabbi Jose says: Qoheleth does not defile the hands, but about the Song of Songs there is dissension.

Rabbi Simon (bar Yohai) says: Qoheleth is one of the things about which the School of Shammai adopted a more lenient ruling and the School of Hillel a more stringent ruling.

Rabbi Simon ben Azzai said: I have heard a tradition from the seventy elders on that day when they made Eleazar ben Azariah head of the college, that the Song of Songs and Qoheleth both defile the hands.

Rabbi Akiva said: God forbid! No one in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs that he would claim that it does not defile the hands, for all ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies, and if anything was in dispute, the dispute was about Qoheleth alone.

Rabbi Johanan ben Joshua, the son of Rabbi Akiva's father-in-law said: According to the words of Ben Azzai, so did they dispute and so did they decide.¹

The text collects opinions on whether the Song of Songs and Qoheleth cause hand defilement like other biblical books. The statements of Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Yose record that a book is in dispute but disagree over which one. Rabbi Simon casts the dispute as one of the classic disagreements between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel, and, while his statement does not specify that their disagreement is about hand defilement, its placement among explicit statements about it makes it appear that the dispute was over hand defilement. Rabbi Simon ben Azzai's tradition records a ruling about Qoheleth and the Song of Songs made on a famous day of decision making among the Tannaim. Rabbi Akiva objects to the notion of a dispute over Song of Songs but raises the possibility that there was a dispute over Qoheleth.

For decades, critical consensus held that two conclusions should be derived from this text: (1) that the phrase "defiling the hands" was a ritual necessity for canonical status and (2) that this passage does not merely collect differing views put forth in disparate places and times but serves

1. Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Greek texts in this essay are mine.

as a recollection of the debate that resulted in the official finalizing of the list of biblical books.² Delineating the canon was determined to have occurred at Yavneh, a center for rabbinic learning, a few decades after the Great Revolt of 67–73 CE, and the gathering has been termed the Council of Yavneh in scholarship.

However, Jack P. Lewis observes that, decades after the supposed canonization at Yavneh, this mishnaic text records rabbis from different generations still contending over which books defile the hands and argues that the fixing of the canon at the Council of Yavneh was an event that never happened at a council that never existed.³ Although this text seems to record a decisive event according to the opinion of Rabbi Simon ben Azzai, later rabbis are still debating the issue and expressing opinions to the contrary. Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Jose, both active in the second century CE, are questioning or even denying that Qoheleth defiles the hands. Lewis argues that it is clear that, whatever occurred in the academy at Yavneh, at least in regard to the Song of Songs and/or Qoheleth, did not constitute a binding legal precedent and that it was not about fixing the canon.

Strikingly, Josephus in *C. Ap.* 1.37–43 bears witness to a closed list of books by the last quarter of the first century CE:

We do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with one another. Our books, those that are justly accredited, are but two and twenty two, contain the record of all the time. Five of these are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history of the birth of man to the death of the lawgiver. This period falls a little short of three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes, King of Persia, the prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

2. Representative of this scholarly consensus are Frants Buhl, *Kanon und Text des alten Testaments* (Leipzig: Akademische, 1891), 3–31; and Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 112–18, 171–74. The idea of a council held at Yavneh was developed by Heinrich Graetz, *Kohelet oder der Salomonische Prediger* (Leipzig: Winter, 1871), 147–73.

3. Jack P. Lewis, “What Do We Mean by Jabneh?,” *JBR* 32 (1964): 125–32.

From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of prophets.

Josephus's testimony serves as evidence for the existence of a closed canon by mid-first century CE. It would truly be odd if, at the same time Josephus is writing about a limited list of books, the rabbis are sitting in Yavneh and deciding whether specific biblical books were to be included in a list of scriptural books. While it is possible that Josephus's canon might be different from that of the rabbis, his point would be hard to uphold if there were (many?) more books than he presented.

Furthermore, the issue that they were debating, hand defilement, was not the criterion indicating that a book was accepted as Scripture. Hand defilement was likely a means of protecting scriptural scrolls from deterioration cause by too much handling.⁴

A claim that the rabbis at Yavneh fixed the canon at Yavneh is not tenable. The rabbis did not vote books in or out. They did not determine the list of books in the canon. Rather, like other Jews in the first century CE, the rabbis inherited an anthology of authoritative books.

Why Were Some Books Controversial and Others Not?

The canonical status of a number of biblical books, such as the Pentateuch, was unquestioned. By contrast, certain books—Qoheleth, Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ezekiel—were the subject of controversy. Books could be in the canon and yet still have controversial content. The rabbis struggled to resolve the problematic nature of certain books. Analyzing why certain books were controversial and others were not illuminates the multiple levels of canonical status and authority.

4. Space constraints prevent a fuller discussion about hand defilement. Three theories deserve special mention. See John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 68–70; Shamma Friedman, "The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands: The Transformation of a Biblical Concept in Rabbinic Theology," in *Minhah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna*, ed. Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 117–32; Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), 111–13.

Controversial books were problematic in a number of ways. The book of Ezekiel was seen by the rabbis as contradicting the Pentateuch and therefore was subject to being stored away and suppressed:

Rav Judah said that Rav said: Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Hananiah ben Hezekiah. For if not for him, the book of Ezekiel would have been stored away because its contents contradict rules found in the Torah.⁵ What did he, Hananiah ben Hezekiah, do? They brought him three hundred jugs of oil up (to his upper story), and he sat alone in the upper story. (He did not move from there until) he interpreted (all of those passages that seemed contradictory and resolved the contradictions). (Shabb. 13b)⁶

Ezekiel is an unusual prophetic book in that it contains legal prescriptions, and the rules it lays down are in conflict with those in the Pentateuch.⁷ The rules for Sabbath, new moon, and holiday offerings in Ezekiel differ from those in Numbers (Ezek 46:4–7; 45:21–25; Num 28:9–22; 29:12–34). The rule for the daily burnt offering differs as well: once a day according to Ezek 46:13–15, in contrast to twice per day in Num 28:3–4. Hananiah ben Hezekiah is portrayed as putting in massive effort to resolve the contradictions: three hundred is a hyperbolic number employed in rabbinic literature for a herculean amount,⁸ and Hananiah is depicted as requiring three hundred jugs of oil to supply light during his efforts.

Books were also considered problematic because they contradicted a theological statement in the Pentateuch. For example, one passage in Qoheleth prompts consternation because it conflicts with Num 15:39–40:

Which the men of Hezekiah copied (Prov 25:1). Why was this said?

Rabbi Johanan said: The sages wished to store away Qoheleth because there were matters in it that veered toward heresy. They said: Moses says, “Do not follow the desire of your heart and the glances of your eyes” (Num 15:39), whereas Solomon says, “Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes” (Qoh 11:9). The strap has been loosened. There is neither justice nor judge. However, when they read

5. The term *דבר תורה* refers specifically to biblical rules (see b. Eruv. 81b). While the passage in b. Shabb. 13b does not articulate what were the contradictions between Ezekiel and the Pentateuch, the talmudic discussion continues on to address ritual rules.

6. This tradition is also found in b. Hag. 13a; b. Men. 45a.

7. The book is also problematic in its mystical content. See b. Hag. 13a.

8. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 179 n. 320.

further on, “But know well that God will call you to account for all such matters” (Qoh 11:9), they acknowledged that Solomon had spoken well. (Midrash Mishlei 25)

A far from enigmatic verse in Qoheleth poses a contradiction, and the conflict is termed heresy, a matter of inner belief and a far different problem from the previous one of contradicting rules.⁹ While the category of heresy has a complicated and dynamic history,¹⁰ the view espoused in the verse from Qoheleth crosses the boundary by articulating a viewpoint opposite that of a verse from the Pentateuch. The theology of a pentateuchal verse was deemed essential, and the Qoheleth verse threatened its centrality. Further, more than contravening a single pentateuchal passage was at stake. The consequence is articulated in the statement, “The strap has been loosened. There is neither justice nor judge.” A central tenet, divine justice, was threatened. Contravening the Pentateuch, whether its rules or theological statements, rendered a text questionable. The final statement in the passage employs another verse from Qoheleth to resolve the contradiction with the pentateuchal verse and theology. The reconciliation stills the threat and renders Qoheleth acceptable.

A parallel passage takes another tack and sees the verse in Qoheleth as linked to the passage in Numbers:

R. Yishmael says: “You shall not go astray after your hearts” (Num 15:40): What is the intent of this? From “Rejoice young man in your youth (... and walk in the ways of your heart”) (Qoh 11:9), (I would not know whether) in a way that is straight or in (any) way that you like; it is, therefore, written, “You shall not go astray after your hearts” (Num 15:40). (Sifre Bemidbar 115)

Rather than naming the verses as contradictory, the interpreter sees the verse in Qoheleth through the lens of Num 15:40. The contradiction is nullified because it is declared that the Numbers verse qualifies Qoh 11:9. While Qoh 11:9 advises that one can do as one pleases, Rabbi Yishmael

9. See the discussion of heresy as denying Israel’s chosenness (b. Sanh. 99a), physical resurrection, and the coming of the Messiah (b. Sanh. 91a).

10. Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16, 65–68.

construes it through the lens of Num 15:40: the intent of the verse from Qoheleth is to advocate for proper behavior, not condone misbehavior.

Qoheleth was also deemed problematic because it was perceived to be self-contradictory:

Rav Judah son of Rabbi Samuel ben Sheilat said in Rav's name: The sages wished to store away the book of Qoheleth because its words are self-contradictory. Yet why did they not store it away? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching.

Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, "What profit does a man have of all his labor that he does under the sun" (Qoh 1:3)? The school of Rabbi Yannai said, Under the sun he has none, but he has it with what existed before the sun (i.e., his labor in studying and observing Torah).¹¹

Its end is religious teaching, as it is written, "When all is said and done, fear God and obey his commandments, for this is for each person" (Qoh 12:13). What is meant by "for this is for each person?" Rabbi Eleazar said, The entire world was created for the sake of this kind of man (the one who fears God and obeys his commandments). Simon ben Azzai—some say Simon ben Zoma—said, This entire world was created only to be a companion to this kind of man. (b. Shabb. 30b)

The passage begins by declaring that Qoheleth is self-contradictory. The self-contradictions are resolved by highlighting that the beginning and end are in accord with the Pentateuch. In so doing, two classic techniques of midrash are employed: (1) the atomization of biblical text, understanding each word, phrase, or clause apart from its context; and (2) the introduction of concepts not found in the context of the biblical book.¹² In interpreting a verse from the beginning of Qoheleth, a distinction is posed between the lack of profit from ordinary work, that which is under the sun, and the gain from studying Torah and obeying its commandments,

11. This passage in Qoheleth prompted concern on the level of theology but did not pose a direct conflict with a pentateuchal passage. In Qoh. Rab. 1:3:1; 11:9:1, and Lev. Rab. 28.1, the rabbinic text solves the contradiction by positing two different types of toil: the toil a person does for himself versus the toil a person undertakes in the study of Torah (so also b. Shabb. 30b). This distinction is foreign to Qoheleth. See Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 2 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), 648–49, with a listing of the other texts.

12. Isaac Heineman, *דרכי האגדה*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1970), 96–98, 15–20.

which existed prior to the sun. The rabbis wrench the sentence out of its context and introduce a rabbinic concept not found in the biblical text, the idea of Torah existing prior to creation. The religious teaching found at the conclusion of Qoheleth is clear in its context, “When all is said and done, fear God and obey his commandments,” but the interpretation inspired by the midrashic impulse to solve a crux interpretum, “for this is for each person,” introduces a concept not found in the biblical context, that the existence of the world is predicated on behalf of the righteous.

The passage in b. Shabbat then addresses the specific internal contradictions of Qoheleth:

How are its words self-contradictory? It is written, “Anger is better than laughter” (Qoh 7:3), but it is written, “I said of laughter: It is to be praised” (Qoh 2:2).¹³ It is written, “Then I commended enjoyment” (Qoh 8:15), but it is written, “And of enjoyment I said, What good is it” (Qoh 2:2). There is no difficulty: “anger is better than laughter”—the anger that the Holy One, blessed be he, displays to the righteous is better than the laughter that the Holy One, blessed be he, laughs with the wicked in this world. “And I said of laughter: It is to be praised”—that refers to the laughter that the Holy One, blessed be he, laughs with the righteous in the world to come. “Then I commended enjoyment”—this refers to enjoyment in consequence of a commandment. “And of enjoyment I said, What good is it”—this refers to enjoyment not in consequence of a commandment. (b. Shabb. 30b)

The meaning of the word *laughter* remains constant in Qoheleth, signifying something along the lines of revelry. But the rabbinic text solves the contradiction by positing two different situations, laughter in this world versus laughter in the world to come, a concept particularly alien to Qoheleth, which denies the existence of any existence after death (Qoh 11:8). The term *enjoyment* preserves the same referent, merrymaking, throughout the book of Qoheleth, but the rabbinic text differentiates between two types of enjoyment, a distinction foreign to the context within the biblical texts.

Finally, the contents of Proverbs, Qoheleth, and the Song of Songs were deemed controversial for another reason. These three books were considered to contain material that should be understood as *meshalot*,

13. This understanding is contrary to most modern translations, which take מְהוּלָּל as “madness.”

parables or proverbs, texts that need to be interpreted; otherwise, they could not be included in the Bible:

Be deliberate in judgment: What is that? This teaches that a man should take time in rendering judgment, for whoever takes time in rendering judgment is cool-headed in judgment. As it is said, “These also are the proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out” (Prov 25:1). It is not that they copied them out but that they took their time.

Abba Saul says: It does not mean that they took their time but that they interpreted. Originally, they said, “Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Qoheleth were to be stored away,” for since they were held to speak *meshalot* and were not among the Holy Scriptures, they (the religious authorities?) arose and stored them away. So they remained until the men of Hezekiah¹⁴ came and interpreted them.

For in Proverbs, it is said:

I saw among the simple-minded,
I noticed among the youngsters,
A lad lacking sense.
He was crossing the street near her corner
And was walking toward her house.
In the twilight at evening,
In the twinkling of night and gloom,
A woman comes toward him,
Set up like a prostitute with stalwart intent. (Prov 7:7–20)

For in the Song of Songs, it is said:

Come, my beloved,
Let us go out into the open,
Let us lie among the henna.
Let us go out early into the vineyards,
Let us see if the vine has flowered,
If its blossoms have opened,
If the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give my love to you. (Song 7:12–13)

For in Qoheleth, it is said:

Rejoice, young man, in your youth,

14. Solomon Schechter notes that the textual reading in Avot de Rabbi Nathan A, “the men of the Great Assembly,” is an error for “the men of Hezekiah” (*Avot de Rabbi Nathan* [Vienna: Lippe, 1897]), A 2 n. 20. The men of Hezekiah are credited in b. B. Bat. 14b–15a as writing down the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Qoheleth, the three books ascribed to Solomon and the three books deemed as problematic in this passage.

and let your heart gladden you in the days of your youth,
 and walk in the ways of your heart,
 and in the sight of your eyes.
 But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. (Qoh 11:9)

For in the Song of Songs, it is said:

I am my beloved's,
 and his desire is for me. (Song 7:11)

This proves not that they took their time but that they interpreted. (Avot R. Nat A 1.4)

The rabbis do not articulate what is problematic about these passages,¹⁵ but we can infer from the passages cited that sexual allurements bluntly promoted is the issue. The passages describe seductive advances, sexual desires, or promiscuity. But what is intriguing is how the rabbis describe these passages.¹⁶ The rabbis often employ a *mashal* to explain a biblical text, but here they call a biblical text a *mashal*. A *mashal* is used as a rhetorical device in the rabbinic exegesis of Scripture, but here the rabbis are deeming a scriptural passage to be a *mashal*. By terming a problematic text a *mashal*, the rabbis are reshaping it. First, they are removing historicity from the text: it does not recount events that happened but embodies a tool created for homiletic and rhetorical purposes. A *mashal* is a fictional narrative, didactic in origin and purpose. This is in contrast to a *ma'aseh*, whose authority is supported by the oddness of the historical event narrated.¹⁷ Furthermore, a *mashal* requires more than its own text: it needs a key to its interpretation. It needs a *nimshal*, the additional information

15. Nor does the text articulate how the men of Hezekiah interpreted the texts so that the texts could be released into circulation.

16. Also intriguing is the statement that these texts were not considered to be part of the Bible, yet they were subject to being stored away, taken out of public circulation, a fate reserved for texts in the biblical canon. This paradox hints at an attitude of ambivalence toward these texts, not Scripture, yet subject to a penalty for problematic Scripture. See Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures*, 78–86; and David Stern, “Ancient Jewish Interpretation of the Song of Songs in a Comparative Context,” in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Natalie B. Dorhmann and David Stern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 90.

17. David Stern, *Parables in Midrash* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 13–15; Stern, “Ancient Jewish Interpretation,” 89–91; Stern, “Just Stories: Fictionality and the Ma'aseh, from the Mishnah to Ma'aseh Yerusalmi,” in *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade*,

that makes its inner meaning clear and leads its reader/hearer to the correct conclusion. Without the extra knowledge, the *mashal* is opaque and is subject to misunderstanding. It would be free-floating and could be interpreted freely. The *nimshal* fixes its meaning. When a biblical text is deemed a *mashal*, it undergoes a transformation in two ways: it becomes fiction whose purpose is didactic, and, most significantly, it becomes a text that cannot be understood on its own. As fiction, it can be taken with a grain of salt, and its problematic nature becomes lessened with its distance from historicity. Even more, a *mashal* requires a *nimshal*, and by terming a scriptural text a *mashal* the rabbis required that it have a specific interpretation—it cannot be a free-floating *mashal* open to any and all interpretation—and thereby they diluted its controversial nature.

So far we have seen that the rabbis deemed a book problematic because (1) it contradicted a rule in the Pentateuch; (2) it contained a statement that contradicted a theological statement in the Pentateuch; (3) it was self-contradictory, and (4) it promoted overt sexuality and promiscuity and therefore was a *mashal*, a text that by itself is not understandable. Chronicles does not have these issues. First, it does not contradict the Torah, whether its rules or theological prescriptions, and in fact its author does his best not to conflict with the Pentateuch. Let one example suffice to demonstrate how possible contradictions with the Pentateuch are avoided. Mindful of the prohibition of Canaanite booty in Deut 7:25, the author of Chronicles reinterprets the verb נָשַׁף in 2 Sam 5:21 to mean that David ordered his soldiers to burn the alien gods (1 Chr 14:12). The reinterpretation of David's act is enabled by a rare meaning of the root as "to burn," a meaning possibly attested in Judg 20:38 and 40 and Jer 6:1 as well as in Lachish 4.10.¹⁸ Second, it is not seen as having internal contradictions. Lastly, Chronicles is not deemed a *mashal* by the rabbis because it does not contain passages promoting sexuality and promiscuity.

ed. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Christine Hayes, and Tzvi Novick (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017), 545–48.

18. Michael Fishbane, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis," in *Antiquity*, part 1 of *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 of *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 42. The author of the passage in Chronicles may have thought he was making an uncommon meaning explicit. Lachish 4 may be found in Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 69–76.

However, Chronicles did not escape scrutiny.

Rabbi Simon in the name of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, and Rabbi Chama the father of Rabbi Hosea in the name of Rabbi: Chronicles was given only for midrashic purposes. That which is written “The sons of Shelah son of Judah: Er father of Lecah (Laadah father of Mareshah, and the families of the linen factory at Beth-ashbea; and Jokim, and the men of Cozeba and Joash, and Saraph, who married into Moab and Jashubi Lehem [the records are ancient]. These were the potters who dwelt at Netaim and Gederah; they dwelt there in the king’s service.” (1 Chr 4:21–23) “Father of Lecah” means the head of the court (literally the father of the court) of Lecah. “Father of Mareshah” means the head of the court of Mareshah. “And the families of the linen factory” refers to Rahab the harlot who concealed the spies in flax, as it is said, “She hid them with the stalks of flax” (Josh 2:6). “At Beth-ashbea” because the spies swore to her, as it is said, “Now, swear to me by the LORD” (Josh 2:12); “and Jokim,” since they kept their oath, “So the young spies went in and brought out Rahab” (Josh 6:23). (Ruth Rab. 2.1)

The initial statement declares that Chronicles is to be understood only though midrashic techniques. The genealogical passage in Chronicles is cryptic, so mentioning an individual as father does not refer to the usual meaning of father as biological progenitor but rather as the head of the court: the term father is used as a cipher for the more specific term “the father of the court,” that is, the head of the court. A term is understood apart from its context in a genealogy, an exegetical move employed to tame controversial texts, as we saw above. The passage in Chronicles is also linked to other biblical passages, a characteristic interpretive move used to forestall contradictions: it is employed here to unfold expressions deemed cryptic. The phrases in Chronicles are linked to the episode of the spies sent to Jericho in Josh 2 because of the shared reference to flax and verbal roots that can be linked to the actions of the spies. Chronicles, thus, is perceived to be hinting at more fully articulated passages elsewhere.¹⁹

Setting Chronicles as a contrast to the controversial scriptural books illuminates the nuances of Scripture. Being a constituent text of Scripture vested books with cultural significance. Even if those books contained problematic content, their status meant that there was a strong impetus

19. Other passages in the genealogies of Chronicles attracted interest. See Mekhilta Amalek 2.

to resolve the conflicts rather than to suppress them. Furthermore, the nature of what was controversial and not controversial reveals that there was a hierarchy of texts within Scripture: the Pentateuch was the most authoritative for behavioral norms and theology, with no contradictions permitted. Besides violating textual hierarchy, other difficulties had to be mitigated. Chronicles had none of these. Moreover, the same methods of interpretation were employed on scriptural texts, whether controversial or not, because scriptural status meant that they were texts worthy of, and needing, specific methods of exegesis.

The Attitude toward Chronicles

Certain biblical texts have a privileged status. There is no doubt that the Pentateuch has received the largest share of attention in Jewish and Christian interpretation of Scripture.²⁰ Assessing the attention focused in later tradition even on most other books in the Bible would result in a long shelf of books with a lengthy list of citations. Not so for Chronicles. The afterlife of Chronicles is not too vibrant: its usage and authority in the late Second Temple period are scant.²¹

Why, then, was it included in the Bible? A number of possibilities may be suggested. First, it was seen as an affirmation and confirmation of other biblical texts. Chronicles was viewed as a supplement to the earlier historical books, not as a contradiction. Striking demonstration of this is found in its name in the Septuagint, *Παραλειπομενον*, “matters omitted.”²² While being supplementary meant that Chronicles was at times neglected in favor of other historical books, it also meant that the distinct worldview of Chronicles as discerned by critical scholarship was effaced and contradictions neither noticed or noted. In fact, it was perceived to offer further material that affirmed and supplemented the earlier historical books. It was seen as complementary, not contradictory.

20. Let one example suffice, if an example is necessary. In Philo, there are two thousand citations from the Pentateuch and only fifty citations from other biblical texts. See W. T. Knox, “A Note on Philo’s Use of the Old Testament,” *JTS* 41 (1940), 31.

21. See Isaac Kalimi, *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), *passim*.

22. Gary N. Knoppers and Paul B. Harvey Jr., “Omitted and Remaining Matters: On the Names Given to the Book of Chronicles in Antiquity,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 227–43.

Chronicles did not prompt controversy because the perception was that Chronicles is complementary to other biblical texts. This is partially due to what it omits. It lacks narratives about many of the biblical figures: everyone up to David is just a brief mention in the lists in 1 Chr 1–9. Adam to Samuel with everyone in between are barely referenced, and the omissions are remarkable to us: no exodus, no revelation at Sinai, none of the central events for the rabbinic tradition. Yet the omissions also mean that there are few outright contradictions, especially with the privileged narratives of the Pentateuch.²³ Chronicles itself rewrites earlier texts in order to make them cohere to the laws of the Pentateuch, as in the example of 2 Sam 5:21 discussed above.

Coherence is central in Josephus's polemic against non-Jewish historians. He criticizes them for what he deemed their frequent contradictions, arguing that "more often than not they confute each other in their works, not hesitating to give the most contradictory accounts of the same events" (*C. Ap.* 1.226). But with regard to Jewish books, he writes that "we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, contradicting one another. Our books, which are justly accredited, are only twenty-two, and contain the record of all time" (*C. Ap.* 1.38).²⁴ There was no contradiction between biblical books in Josephus's mind because he saw the differing sources as complementary and drew from them in his historical narrative.²⁵ The sources present a unified historical narrative.

23. In a recent article, Mika S. Pajunen ("The Saga of Judah's Kings Continues: The Reception of Chronicles in the Late Second Temple Period," *JBL* 136 [2017]: 565–84) argues that Chronicles was incorporated in the Bible because it could not be decided whether Chronicles or the other scriptural books it contradicted were correct; therefore, both traditions were included. However, the question is whether the contradictions identified by contemporary scholars would have been apparent in the late Second Temple period: Jews in the late Second Temple period did not name the differences as contradictions. They did not perceive that there were contradictions, even if they drew from one source rather than from another source. See Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Authority of 1–2 Chronicles in the Late Second Temple Period," *JSP* 3 (1988): 75–76.

24. Michael L. Satlow argues that Josephus's list of a closed canon is the wishful thinking of a Jewish intellectual, and it may be so in light of the other Jewish books in circulation in Josephus's time. Nonetheless, Josephus appears to be speaking of books with a special status. See Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 244.

25. See Christopher Begg, *Josephus' Account of the Early Divided Monarchy*

Chronicles also served to confirm central concepts. For example, the exaltation of King David is promoted and enhanced by Chronicles: David's failures and personal flaws were greatly attenuated, if not omitted, in Chronicles.²⁶ Enhancing David's identity is part of the Chroniclers' overall program of associating the building of the temple and instituting its rituals with David. Omitting David's imperfections and linking David and the temple elevated both the figure of David and the status of the Jerusalem temple. In 1 Chr 14:4–42 David is imagined as commissioning the chanting of psalms, and in 1 Chr 25 David is envisioned as authorizing the personnel serving as singers and instrumentalists in the Jerusalem temple. Similarly, 1 Chr 15:16–26 adds extra material to 2 Sam 6, affirming the status of Second Temple personnel by retrojecting their activities to the reign of David. Chronicles' presentation of David as the one who instituted the regimen of the temple is reused in later texts. The portrayal of David in Ben Sira's praise of the fathers (Sir 47:8–10) is dependent on the description of David in Chronicles: it builds on texts from Chronicles to present David as the one who instituted the singers and instrumentalists in the Jerusalem Temple.²⁷

Most significantly, Chronicles may have been deemed a prophetic text. A number of postbiblical texts serve as evidence for this. First, Josephus considers the historical books, including Chronicles, to be prophetic in origin:

This is naturally or rather necessarily done, because no one is permitted of his own accord to be a writer, nor is there any discrepancy in what is written; only prophets have this privilege and have written the original and earliest accounts of things as they learned them of God himself by inspiration; and others have written what has happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also ... but as to the time from the death of Moses until the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. (C. Ap. 1.37, 40)

(Leuven: Peeters, 1993); and Begg, *Josephus' Story of the Later Monarchy* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

26. See Sara Japhet, *אמונות ודעות בספר דברי הימים* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1977), 375–92.

27. Ben Zvi, "Authority of 1–2 Chronicles," 62.

Josephus appears to be including Chronicles as a historical book produced through prophetic inspiration.²⁸ This stems from the view that Ezra and Nehemiah were the authors of Chronicles and that they were considered prophets.²⁹

Second, a rabbinic source observes that prophecy ceased in the early Second Temple period.

When the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, died, the holy spirit departed Israel. Even so, the (heavenly) echo would be heard. Once, the sages entered the upper story of ben Guria in Jericho. A (heavenly) echo sounded and said to them: "There is a mortal among you who is deserving of the holy spirit, but his generation is not worthy." They looked at Hillel the Elder. When he died, they said: "Oh, the humble one, oh, the pious one, the disciple of Ezra." (t. Sotah 13:2)³⁰

The question is how late the cessation of prophecy was thought to be and whether it would be anterior to Chronicles.³¹ It would depend in part on the dating of Chronicles: if the date of Chronicles depends on the close of its narrative, then Chronicles ends before the cessation of prophecy, and if the date is linked to its putative authors Ezra and Nehemiah,³² then it may be that they are included among the prophets according to rabbinic tradition. The final line of this text offers an answer: the statement that "When he died, they said: 'Oh, the humble one, oh, the pious one, the disciple of Ezra,'" may signify that Ezra was considered worthy of the holy spirit, like a prophet, and that prophecy stopped in his time. Chronicles, therefore, was composed before the cessation of prophecy.

Furthermore, it must also be noted that, although the tripartite division puts Chronicles in the Writings section rather than the Prophets section, the consequence being that Chronicles was not considered

28. Josephus is presumably counting Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

29. According to b. B. Bat. 14b-15a, Ezra and Nehemiah composed their books as well as Chronicles.

30. This text is based on Moses S. Zuckerman, *Tosefta* (Trier: Linzt, 1881), 318.

31. See Frederick Greenspahn, "Why Did Prophecy Cease?," *JBL* 108 (1989): 37-49; Benjamin D. Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation," *JBL* 115 (1996): 31-47.

32. The authorship of Chronicles is ascribed to Ezra and Nehemiah in b. B. Bat. 14b-15a.

prophetic,³³ many references to the Bible assume a bipartite division, with the sharp divide between the Pentateuch and the rest of the books.³⁴ This signifies that Chronicles is in the group that encompasses prophetic books. If these lines of evidence cohere, the conclusion is that Chronicles was deemed to be of prophetic origin and therefore worthy of inclusion in Scripture.

However, prophetic origin may not have been enough. Chronicles itself cites many prophetic texts,³⁵ and its own authority may have been enhanced through its citation of prophetic texts. However, many of these other texts were themselves lost. Prophetic status alone was not enough. Chronicles was significant in another way. The rabbis present Chronicles as studied by the high priest on an auspicious night:

If he were a sage, he would expound. If not, sages would expound in front of him. If he were accustomed to reading, he would read. If not, they would read in front of him. And from what would they read in front of him? From Job, and from Ezra, and from Chronicles. Zechariah ben Kabutal said, many times I read from Daniel in front of him. (m. Yoma 1:6)

As the high priest was preparing for his singular role on Yom Kippur, according to rabbinic tradition, among the texts that were to occupy him was Chronicles. But whether these texts were chosen because of their novelty or appropriate content or for another reason is unknown. Nonetheless, Chronicles was seen as receiving attention from those on the highest level, whether or not the rabbinic account is accurate. That the high priest read Chronicles on the night of Yom Kippur manifests the high status of Chronicles, even if it was not cited often.

Conclusion

Reconstructing the development of the canon has focused on the disputed books. By contrast, the inclusion of Chronicles in the biblical canon did not prompt controversy. Yet at the same time, it was not an often-cited

33. Timothy H. Lim, *The Formation of the Hebrew Canon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 7–9.

34. See Matt 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 16:16; 22:40; Rom 3:21.

35. See Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 19–23.

book. This realization illuminates canonization from a different viewpoint: as much as canonization is about excluding books, it is about including books. The placement of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible reveals essential features of canonization.

The complexity and nuance of the place of the Bible in Jewish culture is exemplified in Chronicles. The rabbis did not determine which books were included in the canon, but that did not mean that they viewed every biblical book as having the same authority. The attitude toward different books varied, manifesting a multiplicity of levels of status within the canon. Chronicles possesses a certain position as part of the canon. In being part of the canon, it becomes vested with authority and cultural significance. Chronicles's level of coherence with the Pentateuch worked to enhance its status, but more than that was needed. Chronicles also lacked the self-contradictions and passages promoting promiscuity that were found problematic with other books. No controversial imperiled its place in the canon.

It is likely as well that the identification of the authors of Chronicles as prophets enhanced its status. Ezra and Nehemiah were deemed to be prophetic figures, and their assumed authorship of Chronicles imbued the book with the minimal status sufficient to be included in the canon. At the same time, the citation of other prophetic works in Chronicles demonstrates that prophetic authorship alone was insufficient. Other books by prophets were lost. Chronicles possessed something more: it was seen as affirming and complementing other biblical texts and apparently essential concepts, and it was seen as attracting the interest of those with high status.

The status of Chronicles in the biblical canon was not controversial. Nonetheless, that did not mean that it was on par with other works. Chronicles possessed exalted status as part of the biblical canon but did not necessarily receive attention equal with other canonical books.

The enigma of canonization cannot be solved by considering only the question of what was in and what was out, what was included in, and what was excluded from, the canon. The absolute division assumed by formulating the mode of inquiry that way does not address the complexity of the status of the differing books within the canon. A rigid partition is a misunderstanding of canon. Canon is not merely a matter of boundaries. The biblical canon as a list does not hint at how a canonical book is read by a scriptural community nor what it is used for. Drawing on it for moral exhortation, implementing it as a guide for behavior, or retaining it in a high status anthology but otherwise neglecting it are different modes of relating to a scriptural text. The distinct levels of attention paid to, and

usage made of, individual books and perhaps even to specific sections within them, reflect the nuances of the authority and application of biblical books in later Jewish and Christian tradition.³⁶

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36. For a study of the differing usage of canonical texts by other canonical texts before the canon, see Nathan Mastnjak, "Prestige, Authority, and Jeremiah's Bible," *JR* 98 (2018): 542–58. For a study of canonicity of both scriptural and other texts in Jewish circles, see Benjamin D. Sommer, "Unity and Plurality in Jewish Canons: The Case of Oral and Written Torahs," in *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108–50.

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The Phenomenon of Alternative Interpretations in the Commentary of Rabbi Tuvia Son of Rabbi Eliezer, *Leqah Tov*, on the Five Scrolls

Gershon Brin

Along with all the interpretations in *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls,¹ we meet the phenomenon of alternate interpretations in some of the verses. These interpretations appear in three forms: (1) a new interpretation that opens without any special introductory formula; that is, there are two interpretations without any introductory formula before the second one; (2) a new opening formula, **דבר אחר**, that presents a second exegesis of the verse under discussion; and (3) a new opening formula, **ס"א**, which stands for **סברא אחרת**² and has the same intent as in number 2.

Sometimes there is an interpretation starting with each of the two formulas, **דבר אחר** and **ס"א**. This means that *three* interpretations of that verse are offered.³ In the book of Ruth, there are no appearances of **ס"א**.

1. This paper is a modified version of chapter 3 of my **עיונים ב'לקח טוב' לחמש קווים בפרשנות הביזנטית בתחילת האלף השני לספירה** [Studies in the commentary *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls: characterizing Byzantine biblical exegesis at the turn of the second millennium] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2018).

2. That is, "another understanding," "another way of thinking," or the like.

3. As for the phenomenon of the alternate interpretations, it worth noting that Jonathan Jacobs pointed out that *Leqah Tov* on Song of Songs has double interpretations: a literary interpretation, on the one hand, which is a great achievement of R. Tuvia, and an allegorical one, on the other hand. The latter is the standard rabbinic exegesis on Song of Songs until his time. However, R. Tuvia inaugurated a new method by applying literary interpretation to part of the Scriptures. The term **פירוש** stands between the two interpretations. See Jonathan Jacobs, "The *Leqah Tov* Commentary on 'Song of Songs': Its Place in the History of Biblical Exegesis and Its Relationship with the Commentary of Rashi" [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 23 (2014): 225–41; on this point, see 228.

Sometimes the structure unexpectedly presents no primary exegesis followed by a דבר אחר or with ס"א; rather, the first or only exegesis itself begins with דבר אחר or with ס"א.

In one case (Eccl 1:6) there appear the terms: "if according to the *first interpretation* ... or if according to the *second interpretation*...", and in the continuation it is written: "ס"א on the second interpretation."

The question to be asked is: What is the difference between the various interpretations that appear in *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls? Usually there is no statement of preference for one interpretation over the other, no indication that a דבר אחר or ס"א is preferable to the prior interpretation or vice versa. Also, there is no indication of a perception of weakness in one interpretation necessitating an alternate second or third interpretation.

In the commentary on Ecclesiastes, the form פשוטו של פסוק appears twice in one of the interpretations (the second or the fourth one), which can teach us that the other interpretations are not פשט.⁴

It is worth noting that, in the aggregate, the phrase פשוטו של פסוק⁵ appears nine times in the commentaries on the Five Scrolls. However, this form does not appear even once in *Leqah Tov* on the Pentateuch.⁶

In *Leqah Tov* to Lamentations, דבר אחר and ס"א offer clear alternatives to the "main" (i.e., first) exegesis.

In the commentary to Ecclesiastes, the phrase דבר אחר appears only once.

We will now turn to a discussion of a range of verses from the Five Scrolls that have alternate interpretations in *Leqah Tov*. In every case at least two interpretations for one verse will be cited. In addition to the observations noted above concerning this phenomenon, I will show the exegete's behavior regarding the presentation of more than one interpreta-

4. The phrase פשוטו של מקרא/כתוב does appear nine times in the commentaries on the Five Scrolls; however, I am interested here only in those cases in which they are part of the formula discussed in the present paper, i.e., in the framework of the phenomenon of the alternate interpretations. It is so, as the exegete says, that one interpretation is not according to the plain meaning, which may show that other interpretation is according to the plain reading.

5. There is an Aramaic-form substitute פשטיה של פסוק. See, e.g., וישמע משה את, העם בוכה למשפחותיו, Num 11:10. Note also the forms פשטן של פסוקים and מדרשו של פסוק in *Leqah Tov* to the Pentateuch.

6. The form פשוטו מידו יוצא appears twice in the commentaries to the Five Scrolls and five times in the commentaries to the Pentateuch. However, none of these scriptures deal with phenomenon discussed in this essay.

tion in this range of scriptures. I do not find particular significance in the exegete's choice to cite the classic rabbinic interpretation in some instances while not mentioning them in others. At the end of the essay I offer my conclusions regarding this phenomenon.

Esther⁷

Esther 1:5

ובמלואת הימים האלה עשה המלך לכל העם הנמצאים בשושן הבירה למגדול ועד קטן משתה שבעת ימים בחצר גנת ביתן המלך

At the end of this period, the king gave a banquet for seven days in the court of the king's palace garden for all the people who lived in the fortress Shushan, high and low alike.

בחצר גינת ביתן המלך in the court of the king's palace garden:

"בחצר גינת ביתן המלך". רב ושמואל, חד אמר הראוי לחצר לחצר, והראוי לגינה לגינה, הראוי לביתן לביתן. וחד אמר הושיבן בחצר ולא החזיקתם, הושיבן בגינה ולא החזיקתם עד שהכניסן לביתן. במתניתא תני הושיבן בחצר ופתח להן שני פתחים אחת לגינה ואחת לביתן. דבר אחר "בחצר גינת ביתן המלך". גינת הביתן היתה נטועה אילני פירות ובשמים, ועשויה כפים עד חצי האילנות, ורצופה אבנים טובות ומרגליות, והאילנות מצילין עליהן.

There is a discussion between Rav and Shemuel. One said:

What is appropriate for the court was in the court, and what is appropriate for the garden was in the garden, and what is appropriate for the palace was in the palace. And one said: He gave them seats in the court, and it could not hold them. Then he sat them in the garden, and it did not hold them, until finally he sat them in the palace. In the Mishnah,

7. See the following on *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls: A. W. Greenup, ed., *The Commentary of Rabbi Tobia Ben Elieser on Canticles* (London: n.p., 1909); Seckel Bamberger, *Lekach Tob zu Megillat Ruth von Rabbi Tobia ben Elieser* (Mainz: Lehmann, 1887); A. W. Greenup, ed., *The Commentary of R. Tobia B. Elieser on Echah*. 2nd ed. (London: n.p., 1908); Gerson Feinberg, ed., *Tobia ben Elieser's Commentar zu Koheleth (Lekach tob)* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1904); and Salomon Buber, ed., *Sammlung agadischer Commentare zum Buche Ester* (Wilna: Romm, 1886). For *Leqah Tov* on the Penta-teuch, see Salomon Buber, ed., *המכונה פסיקתא זוטרתא על חמשה חומשי*, תורה מדרש לקח טוב: המכונה פסיקתא זוטרתא על חמשה חומשי, 5 vols. in 3 (Wilna: Romm, 1880). Biblical verses are cited from the NJPS, with minor changes as needed.

they said: He sat them in the court and opened two entrances for them: one into the garden and one into the palace.

דבר אחר "in the court of the king's palace garden"—The garden of the palace was planted with fruit trees and perfumes..., and it is covered with precious stones and gems, and the trees cast their shadow on them.

In the first exegesis there is a connection between the place of the feast and the objects mentioned there. This exegesis relies on prior sources from the early rabbinic sages. The second exegesis refers to the objects mentioned in each part of the verse. The two interpretations are ultimately quite similar.

Esther 1: 7

והשקות בכלי זהב וכלים מכלים שונים

Royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in golden beakers, beakers of different designs.

שונים "different"—as in Prov 24: 21, ועם שונים אל תתערב, "And do not mix with dissenters [lit., those who differ]."

ס"א וכלים מכלים שונים "beakers of different types"—Another understanding: There were those who would drink once from a glass and not drink from it any more, but [instead] it was placed in a room, and another glass was taken out for them [to continue drinking].

ס"א שונים "different"—Another understanding: He brought his vessels and Elam's vessels, and it turned out that his vessels were nicer, and then [he brought] his vessels and the temple vessels, and it turned out that the temple's were nicer than his.

So we have here three interpretations referring to שונים: one "main" exegesis and two instances of ס"א. The first explanation regards the word as referring to strangers or the like, and then different glasses for the different manners of drinking, and then various vessels from the king's wars.

Esther 8:10

וישלח ספרים ביד הרצים בסוסים רכבי הרכש האחשתרנים בני הרמכים

Letters were dispatched by mounted couriers, riding steeds used in the king's service, bred of the royal stud.

בני הרמכים—In the talmudic language רמכי רמכי (b. Ta'an. 23a); these are selected horses (עיררים).

ס"א רמכים—These are the riders who raise their hands and hit the horses in order to make them run.

This time the exegete is helped not by the Talmud's sages but by the language of the Talmud, according to which he decided that the form בני הרמכים refers either to the types of the horses or to their riders.

Lamentations

Lamentations 1:1

And why are the lamentations arranged in alphabetical order? So that they will be recited by heart by the mourners.

דבר אחר Why was Israel punished in alphabetical order? They sinned from A to Z [lit. from *aleph* to *tav*]; therefore, they were punished from A to Z. You should know that the curses in the book of Deuteronomy from *vav* until *heh*, as is written there from לא תשמע ויהיה אם לא תשמע ("But if you do not obey," Deut 28:15) through ואין קונה ("but none will buy," v. 68). Thus, there are twenty-four verses and twenty-two letters there, the total number of the [Hebrew] alphabet.

ס"א Why were they punished from A to Z? God said: יען וביען במשפטי מאסו ("for the abundant reason that they rejected My rules," Lev. 26:43). I had intended to bless them from A to Z, as it is said from אחי בחוקותי ("If you follow My laws," Lev. 26:3) to קוממיות ("walking erect," v. 13). However, they came to stink and were punished from A to Z.

Surveying the various interpretations about several options for interpreting the alphabetical order of the verses, all are introduced by דבר אחר or ס"א. There are three answers to the question of why there is an alphabetical arrangement to the verses in the book of Lamentations. The first is about the ease of memorizing the lamentations by the mourners. Then we find the various kinds of punishment listed from A to Z, and the exegete brings his evidence from the list of curses in the book of Deuteronomy. The third exegesis: God planned to bless them from A to Z, but they sinned against him from A to Z and were therefore punished alphabetically as well.

Ruth

Ruth 4:17

ותקראנה לו השכנות שם לאמר ילד בן לנעמי ותקראנה שמו עובד הוא אבי ישי
אבי דוד

And the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son is born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

"A son is born to Naomi"—From here we learn that one who raises a child or an orphan in his house is regarded by Scripture as if one had actually given birth to him, as it is written: "A son is born to Naomi."—Did Naomi give him birth?! Ruth did, but Ruth gave him birth and Naomi raised him; therefore, he was known as Naomi's.

דבר אחר "to Naomi"—and not "to Boaz." This teaches [us] that, when Boaz came to Ruth in that night, he died, and Ruth kept him on her abdomen all night, so that no one would say that she had conceived from another person, and when all came in the morning they found him lying dead on her abdomen; therefore, he was known as Naomi's.

הלא אבקש לך מנוח אשר ייטב לך—דבר אחר יולד בן לנעמי ("I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy," Ruth 3:1).

Although the talmudic sages are not mentioned here at all, not even a single name of one of the rabbis, the formula "From here we learn that ... is regarded by Scripture..." (מכאן ... מעלה עליו הכתוב) and the like show that the exegete is relying on a certain rabbinic source. The same is true regarding the second exegesis, which uses the formula "This teaches [us] that" (מלמד ש...), which relies on a talmudic source or the like.

Thus we find here three alternative interpretations: (1) the child is seen as Naomi's because she raised him; (2) as Boaz died in the middle of his intercourse with Ruth, the child was known as Naomi's; (3) the child was referred to as Naomi's name because she said to Ruth: "I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy." Note in this regard what is added in the exegesis to Ruth 3:1: *ללא בית בעלה*, "That there is no rest for a woman but in her husband's house."

Ruth 1:13

הלהן תשברנה עד אשר יגדלו הלהן תעגנה לבלתי היות לאיש אל בנתי כי מר לי
מאד מכם כי יצאה בי יד ה'

Should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the LORD has struck out against me.

“Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage?”—Should you sit as “anchored women” (עגונות, unable to marry) and be without any man?

המוכר את הספינה מכר את העוגין (‘‘He who sells a ship has sold ... anchor,’’ b. B. Bat. 5a); that is, will you conduct yourselves [i.e., lead your lives] without a man until these children will be raised?

The first exegesis for תעגנה is: Should you be ‘‘anchored women’’? The second exegesis comes from the anchor of the ship, with the meaning of ‘‘conduct yourself.’’ Should you sit alone and lead your lives until these children, Ruth’s new children, become adults?

Ruth 4:13

ויבא אליה ויתן ה' לה הריון ותלד בן

And he cohabited with her. The LORD let her conceive, and she bore a son.”

‘‘The LORD let her conceive’’—R. Simon son of Laqish said: Ruth did not have a womb [עיקר מיטרין]; therefore God ‘‘planted’’ a womb into her body so that she could conceive and become pregnant.

דבר אחר—All the women give birth after 271 days [and that happened even to her].

The first exegesis, borrowed from R. Simon son of Laqish, deals with ‘‘planting’’ a womb into Ruth’s body, since she did not have such an organ in her body. The second exegesis deals with completing the number of days of her pregnancy in order that she should have a fruitful one.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1:4

דור הלך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עמדת

One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever.

Since he has said beforehand: מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו תחת השמש ("What real value is there for a man in all the gains he makes beneath the sun?" Eccl 1:3), [the author continues with our verse]. As the sun rolls across the sky, rising in the east and setting in the west and then returning to its place, so it is with the generations. "One generation goes, another comes" refers to people who are born and at last die and others come in place of them.

"One generation goes, another comes."—R. Brachia said a generation (דור) is no less than 600,000, as it is said (Deut 1:35): אם יראה איש... באנשים האלה הדור הרע הזה... ("Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see...," Deut 1:35. This shows that there is no day when fewer than 600,000 die and another 600,000 are not born.

ס"א "One generation goes, another comes."—This shows that in the future the dead will rise to life and stand in the same position as they were when they died.

The interpretations are these: (1) the exchange of the generations, with one dying and in its place a new one is born; (2) people die, and newborns fill their places; (3) ס"א speaks about the number 600,000 of the dead and the newborns; (4) another ס"א on the method of the dead's return to the world as they stand again in the same form as when they had died.

Ecclesiastes 1: 6

הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח
Going southward, turning northward, ever turning blows the wind. On its rounds, the wind returns.

"Going southward..." [using a masculine singular verb]—This refers to the previous verse, וזרח השמש ("The sun rises...", using a masculine singular verb, v. 5), as the wind is not referred in the masculine form: ורוח סערה באה (Ezek 1:4 [slightly emended]), but it applies to the sun if [we read the verse] according to the first exegesis. Alternatively, according to the second exegesis the phrase refers to Israel, which shines, and that means that everyone goes to the south, as wisdom was in the land of Israel, which is called "south," as it is said, הטה מקדשים אל נגב והנבא אל מקדשים "Proclaim to the Negev and proclaim against temples."⁸

8. This is a mistaken citation in *Leqah Tov*, formed by joining parts of two clauses in Ezek 21:2 with a clause from Ezek 21:7.

ס"א referring to the second exegesis, "Going southward"—that is, during the day, since it emerges from the east and goes southward, and during the hot days it goes to the east and the south and the west, and it sets at the western-northern corner, and during the days of the rains it goes out from the southeastern corner and goes to the south to the southwestern corner, and it sets. Thus it always goes to the south.

The first interpretation uses "south" (דרום) as an epithet for the Land of Israel, the place of wisdom in the context of the people of Israel, while in the second interpretation the term is understood to refer to geographical directions in the context of the direction of the sun during the different seasons of the year.

Ecclesiastes 1:7

כל הנחלים הלכים אל הים והים איננו מלא

All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full."

"All streams flow into the sea"—Scripture speaks here about the people Israel, which used to enter the Temple Mount. "Yet the sea is never full"—as was dealt with in the Mishnah: עומדין צפופין ומשתחוים רווחים ("They are jammed together, [but] when they go down and prostrate themselves, they have plenty of room," m. Avot 5:5). "R. Samuel son of R. Ima said in the name of R. Aha: יהא שלא יחא שומע ("They left a space of four cubits in every direction so that one would not hear the prayer of another," b. Yoma 21a, Eccl. Rab. 1:20).

אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת "To the place [from] which they flow, the streams flow back again" (Eccl. 1:7)—that they returned to their tents happy and contented.

The exegesis is about the people gathering at the Temple Mount, in connection with the saying of R. Samuel son of R. Imma. The second is about geography: the direction of the flow of water to the ocean. It is worth noting that the second exegesis is defined פשוטו של פסוק, meaning the plain meaning of the verse in context. One can infer from this that in the eyes of R. Tuvia the first exegesis is not *peshat*. For the first, the subject is coming to the Temple Mount, while for the second it is the rivers being filled again with water. This note about פשוטו של פסוק occurs only twice in the context of alternate interpretations in *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls.

Ecclesiastes 4:6

טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא חפנים עמל ורעות רוח

Better is a handful of gratification than two fistfuls of labor, which is pursuit of wind.

“Better is a handful of gratification”—in Paradise—“than two fistfuls of labor” in the nonsense of this world.

דבר אחר—This verse speaks about the need of the world. It is better to be one who studies and repeats his learning and thus knows what he has studied than one who studies a lot but is not familiar with what he has studied.

It is better to be one who has ten pieces of gold and makes a living from them than one who is a moneylender with interest and thus earns his income at other people's expense.

It is better to be one who has one field ... and makes a living from it than one who has many fields but they are full of thorns.

It is better to be one who works hard and gives a small coin to a poor man than one who steals and is a robber and gives charity.

This is the only place in *Leqah Tov* on Ecclesiastes that uses the form דבר אחר. The first exegesis speaks about the preference of living in Paradise, that is, after death, than during life or, in his terms, the nonsense of this life on earth. The exegesis דבר אחר deals with day-to-day living, that is, practical life, regarding one who is knowledgeable in his studies as against one who studies a lot but does not remember anything about it. Another exegesis is about one who is satisfied with his small amount of food versus one who is a moneylender and extracts interest from needy people. Another is about one who is satisfied with his one field versus one who has many fields but they are neglected and are therefore full of thorns.

Ecclesiastes 2:9

וגדלתי והוספתי מכל שהיה לפני בירושלם אף חכמתי עמדה לי

Thus I gained more wealth than anyone before me in Jerusalem. In addition, my wisdom remained with me.”

“In addition, my wisdom remained with me”—everything that I wisely thought to do [reading the phrase לי עמדה more literally] stood up for me.”

The first exegesis is about suffering and the work of escaping from evil, stating that because of wisdom he was saved. The second deals with the worth of his decision to act wisely, and this stood him in good stead, enabling him to advance in his life.

Ecclesiastes 10:10

אם קהה הברזל והוא לא פנים קלקל וחילים יגבר ויתרון הכשיר חכמה

If the ax has become dull and he has not whetted the edge, he must exert more strength. Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence.

“If the ax has become dull”—[In the word] הברזל (“the ax”), the letter ה comes instead of the letter כ, as it does in the clause ככהן כעם ויהיה כעם ככהן (“Layman and priest shall fare alike,” Isa 24:2 [in which a less idiomatic version would replace כעם with העם]). That means: if the sky is blunt like iron, not bringing dew and rain, [then]...

“he has not whetted the edge”—that the public did not act properly and they spoiled their deeds. What should they do?

“he must exert more strength”—Let them declare a fast and assemble the people.

“Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] wisdom”—Then they will have an advantage and allowance by performing acts of wisdom.

The rabbis said,⁹ “If you see a student for whom his studies are as hard as iron, it is due to his master who does not show him his smiling face, as is written ‘and he has not whetted the edge.’ What should he do? Send him many friends in order to please him. ‘Thus’ he will have ‘the advantage of a skill [and] wisdom’” (see b. Ta’an. 8a).

ס"א—This refers to a student who does not understand his studies. If his knowledge is dull as an ax and he does not understand what his master tells him, [then...]

“[and] he has not whetted [קלקל] the edge”—he does not review his studies and does not turn the pages of a book, as in קלקל בחצים (“He has shaken arrows,” Ezek 21:26). What shall he do?

“He must exert more strength.”—He has to sit for long sessions and add time in thinking about his studies. [Then...]

9. I have changed the citation by replacing the page in b. Ta’anit with a difference one from the source in *Leqah Tov*.

“Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] wisdom”—It will benefit him, and his wisdom will become greater.

א"ס על פשוטו של פסוק—according to the simple contextual meanings of the verse.

“If the ax has become dull”—so that its sharpness does not cut
“and he has not whetted the edge”—because he has not sharpened it with the sharpener.

“He must exert more strength”—Let him go to the blacksmith, and he will hit with all his might.

“Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] wisdom.” This is the wisdom that needs morality and testing, as it is written אולת קשורה בלב נער שבט מוסר ירחיקנה ממנו (“If folly settles in the heart of a lad, the rod of discipline will remove it,” Prov 22:15).

Here there are four interpretations for א"ס קלקל והוא לא פנים קלקל, “If the ax has become dull and he has not whetted the edge.” According to the first, הברזל is to be read as כבזרזל; that is, if the sky is dark as iron and there is no rain, the people must fast and pray. The second, which comes without any introductory formula such as דבר אחר or the like, is taken from the rabbis. It is about the student who has difficulties in his studies due to his prudent master, teaching that one must gather many friends and calm down and at last his wisdom is increased.

The third and fourth come with א"ס. The third, like the second, speaks about a student who does not understand his studies, and the solution is sitting longer sessions on the books, thinking a lot, and then his wisdom increases. In the fourth, which is characterized as פשוטו של פסוק, wisdom is compared to the blacksmith's work with iron. The wisdom necessitates morality and experience, and the exegete brings for comparison the verse אולת קשורה בלב נער שבט מוסר ירחיקנה ממנו.

Song of Songs

Song of Songs 1:3

לריח שמניך טובים שמן תורק שמך על כן עלמות אהבוך

Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance, / Your name is like the finest oil— / Therefore do maidens love you.

“Your name is like finest oil.”—Even though our oil was poured onto the streets as an oil empties from one vessel into another and we were emptied of all the favors you did for our fathers, your name is always in our mouth, as is said: כל זאת באתנו ולא שכחנוך (“All this has come upon

us, yet we have not forgotten you,” Ps 44:18)—but rather [our declaration of] your uniqueness is in the midst of us.

[There appears here no explicit indication, such as ט"א or the like, that what follows is an alternative exegesis.]

“Your name is like the finest oil”—My father, of blessed memory, explained that שמן תורק is the name of an oil that has a good scent for giving light, since שמן יורק [with a masculine modifier] is not what is written, even though שמן is masculine, as is the word שם [“name”—and therefore תורק does not modify either noun]; therefore we must say that תורק is the name of the oil.

דבר אחר: “Your name is like the finest oil”—The word תורק has a *tav* instead of a *yod*, as the letters ת"ן אית"ן are interchangeable. The meaning of the verse is that, like good oil, which when it is poured from one vessel to another loses its fragrance, so the name of the just people had gone out in the place where they were slaughtered for the sanctity of God's name, such as R. Simon son of Gamliel, the Jewish Patriarch, and R. Ishmael son of Elisha, the high priest, son of a high priest.

We have found here the following three interpretations: (1) although our oil was emptied into the streets, we did not abandon our God; (2) the oil of Turak—this was its name—was used as lamp oil because of its fine smell; (3) the third repeats the first: as the oil is emptied from one vessel to another and therefore its smell has dissipated, the name of the just people was famous as they died because of their faith in his Holy Name, such as the Jewish Patriarch and so on.

Song 1:3

על בן עלמות אהבך

Therefore do maidens love you.

“Therefore do maidens love you”—Therefore Israel declares your uniqueness [lit. “the uniqueness of your name”] in every generation.

“Therefore do maidens love you”—All the days they have loved you. All the maidens that you created have not forgotten you, in the Land [of Israel] and abroad, Your Name is always in their mouths.

דבר אחר על מות אהבך—[Reading עלמות as two words, על מות—“above death”] beyond death they love you. Although dead men do not deny your name, as it is written: אם הרגם ודרשוהו ושבּו ושחרו אל (“When he struck them, they turned to him and sought God once again,” Ps 75:34).

דבר אחר—Like ועלמות אין מספר (“And damsels without number,” Song 6:8). That is, even the nations may love you and attach themselves to [the

idea of] your uniqueness, because they see Israel declaring your uniqueness, and therefore they also seek to come under the wings of the divine presence.

We have found here the following three interpretations: (1) All the days they loved you, all the worlds (?) you created; we did not forget you either in the Land of Israel or abroad; your name is on our lips at all time. (2) דבר אחר—“The dead do believe in you”—This is his explanation of על מות. (3) The nations loved you, and they imitated Israel by clinging to God.

Song 1:5

שחורה אני ונאווה בנות ירושלם כאהלי קדר ביריעות שלמה

I am dark, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem—Like the tents of Kedar, Like the pavilions of Solomon.

“Like the tents of Kedar”—Black on the outside but nice on the inside. So the Torah scholars are ugly on the outside, since they turn black from assiduous study of Scriptures, but nice on the inside because of their piety, according to their hearts.

“Like the tents of Kedar”—Even though the Israelites are driven from one exile to another. “Like the tents of Kedar”—As they carry their tents from one place to another and they do not remain in place, undisturbed and tranquil, as the sky that does not move from its place. “Like the pavilions of Solomon [*shelomo*]”—of the King of Kings, to whom peace belongs [reading *shelomo* as “his peace”].

The second exegesis does not have any indication, such as ס"א or דבר אחר, and it instead appears as if it were a first exegesis. The first deals with the days of wandering in the desert when God's holy tent was in the midst of the people. The second exegesis is about the scholars of Torah whose form is dark on their outside but who are nice from within, their beauty being due to the fear of God in their hearts. The third exegesis deals with the wandering of Israel in the desert while they moved their tents from place to place and from one place of exile to another, and they are “like the pavilions of Solomon,” meaning of God, to whom peace belongs.

Song of Songs 1:11

תורי זהב נעשה לך עם נקדות הכסף

We will make you wreaths of gold / with spangles of silver.

“We will make you”—Like *נעשה אדם בצלמנו* “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26), and it is like *אעשה* (“I will make”).

דבר אחר “Let us make man”—Like *ישועת כל נעשה ארץ* (“We have won no victory on earth,” Isa 26:18). Every time that you find *לך* with *shewa* (שווא), it is for masculine; with *pataḥ* (פתח) it is for feminine.

In the first exegesis, *נעשה* (“Let us make”) employs a plural form as a mark of respect (instead of *אעשה*, singular “I will make”); the second notes that the vocalization of the pronominal suffix differs between masculine and feminine.

דבר אחר “We will make you wreaths of gold”—This is about the giving of the Torah, [described as] *הנחמדים מזהב ומפז רב* (“more desirable than gold, than much fine gold,” Ps 19:11).

דבר אחר “We will make you wreaths of gold”—As is written *תחת הנחשת* עם נקדות. *אביא זהב* “Instead of copper I will bring gold” (Isa 60:17). *הכסף* “with spangles of silver”—*ותחת הברזל אביא כסף* “instead of iron I will bring silver,” Isa 60:17; *חיל גוים יבאו לך שפעת גמלים תכסך בכרי מדין* (“The riches of nations shall flow to you. Dust clouds of camels shall cover you, dromedaries of Midian and Ephah ... and their silver and gold as well” (Isa 60:5–9).

There are two interpretations here: the first starts with *דבר אחר*, which is used always for a second or third option. This exegesis sees in *זהב תורי* (“wreaths of gold”) a literary expression for the giving of the Torah to Israel, while the second speaks about giving gold to Israel as a compensation, as part of their salvation.

Summary

In this paper I have dealt with a group of texts from *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls in which there appear two interpretations or more to various verses. Here I have brought only some of those verses. In each of these cases I have explained the exegete’s meaning in these interpretations.

I have not found a systematic order for these cases as might be expected, such as a weakness of one interpretation that caused the exegete to add a different interpretation, which is then offered. Only in two cases in *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls in which there is a *דבר אחר*, that is, a second interpretation, and sometimes even also a third interpretation, does there appear an introduction of the formula *פשוטו של פסוק*, “the

simple, *straightforward* meaning of the verse,” which would mean that the first one is not the *peshat* (the plain meaning in context). If so, the exegete has made clear in these cases the superiority of the second interpretation over the first one. In some of the instances, the exegete employs rabbinic sources in his interpretation.

In most instances, then, there is no basis for considering what weakness the exegete found in the first exegesis that he offered or in the second one, because of which he offered a different exegesis. Perhaps one can consider that the alternate interpretations are a result of the development of the scholar's work, that is, that in various manuscripts of this work there appear a certain exegesis while in other manuscripts there appears a different one. Thus the alternate phenomenon was created by the assembling of the various manuscripts by some editor.

If this is so, there was actually only one interpretation, and by compiling the various manuscripts the double or threefold options of interpretations were created. This makes it appear as though the scholar undertook a deliberation between several options of explaining how to solve the issues in the verse, while in the original position there was no such deliberation in his thinking.

The phenomenon of the alternate interpretations in *Leqah Tov* has a clear parallel in the work of early Byzantine scholars, as I have shown in my book *רעואל וחבריו*.¹⁰ In this way *Leqah Tov* continued the exegetical method and approach employed by the early Byzantines.

In my book on *Leqah Tov* on the Five Scrolls, I point to a number of methods in which *Leqah Tov* continued the path of his Byzantine predecessors.¹¹ It is worth noting that the system of the alternate interpretations is not as common there as in *Leqah Tov* and that, as in *Leqah Tov*, there is no systematic order of the interpretations or of the use of terms such as ס"א or דבר אחר.

10. See רעואל וחבריו: פרשנים יהודיים מביזנטיון מסביבות המאה העשירית לספירה [Reuel and his friends: Jewish Byzantine exegetes from around the tenth century CE] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2012), 50–55, 402–8, etc. However, the system of providing more than one exegesis is done there with a different formula.

11. For many examples of such an influence, see chapter 14 of my עיונים בלקח טוב' לחמש מגילות.

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The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1–43) as the Plan of Jewish History

Alan Cooper

In a thirteenth-century polemical work, Joseph ben Nathan Official records a dispute between his father and a monk named Guerin concerning the interpretation of Deut 32:21, the verse from the Song of Moses that begins with the words, “they incensed me with nongods, vexed me with their idols.” Brother Guerin says to Rabbi Nathan, “Because of your wickedness and inferiority, you [Jews] are enslaved to us [Christians], for we exceed you in importance.” Rabbi Nathan responds, “It is a divine attribute to requite measure for measure: we incensed God with that which was inferior to him, and he has done likewise to us, as it is said [in the continuation of the verse] ... ‘I will incense them with a nonpeople, vex them with a nation of fools.’ If there were a more foolish nation than you, God would have enslaved us to them.”¹

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity Section of the Society of Biblical Literature at its annual meeting in 2007. It is a pleasure to publish it in honor of a great friend and colleague. Unless otherwise noted, all Jewish texts are cited from the digital files of the Bar-Ilan University Responsa Project, Disk on Key (DOK) v. 26 (2018), and all translations are mine.

1. Joseph ben Nathan Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-meqanne*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1970), 62; similarly, *Sefer nitsahon yashan*, in David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 35 (Heb.), 75 (Eng.). Cf. also the parallels in Tosaphist commentaries cited by Rosenthal ad loc., n. 3. *Da’at zeqanim* identifies the “nonpeople” of the verse with Franciscans and Dominicans and *Hadar zeqanim* with “mendicants who cause trouble for the Jews everywhere and whose schemes are more despicable than those of any nation.” Joseph Bechor Shor (ad loc.) refers to the vile inhabitants of Barbarya and Martenai (b. Yebam. 63b), “those who oppress Israel like these Christians.” See

In order to clarify what is at stake in that exchange, it will be useful to move ahead three centuries, to Martin Luther's commentary on the same verse. According to Luther:

This means: "Just as they deserted Me and took up another god—which I could not endure—I, in turn, shall take up another people when they have been rejected. This will torment them violently." That has happened, as the apostle bears witness in Rom 11:11ff., since the heathen have been accepted through the Gospel. And to the present day the Jews are irrevocably angry with us for denying that they are the people of God and for asserting that according to this verse we are the people of God.²

Luther amplifies his point in his comment on verse 36, "The Lord will vindicate his people," which he understands to mean that God "will be merciful ... only to those who serve Him, that is, to the remnant of the people converted to Christ. Otherwise the power of all will be gone, and all that remains will be consumed."³

Beginning in the thirteenth century, Jewish commentary on the Song of Moses evinces increasing awareness of Christian supersessionist readings of the Song. Engagement with those readings is transformative and productive for Jewish interpretation, as I intend to illustrate first by documenting the origin of the Jewish response in the thirteenth-century commentary of Moses ben Nahman (Ramban), then by taking up implicit and explicit anti-Christian elements in two fifteenth-century works: a sermon by Isaac Arama and the commentary on Deuteronomy by Isaac Abarbanel.

also Aharon b. Yosi Hakohen, *Sefer ha-gan*, ed. J. Mitchell Orlian (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2009), 366 with nn. 109–10.

2. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther's Works 9 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), 294–95.

3. Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, 298. There is nothing unusual about Luther's interpretation. Since antiquity, as Gerda Heydemann observes, Deut 32:21 "was commonly interpreted as a prophetic foretelling of the transition of the covenant to the Christians" ("People[s] of God? Biblical Exegesis and the Language of Community in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe," in *Meanings of Community across Medieval Eurasia: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Eirik Hovden et al. [Leiden: Brill, 2016], 28). For a selective summary of patristic use of Deut 32 in anti-Jewish polemic, see Richard H. Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 2/63 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 281–84. Bell comments (284), "The Fathers ... see no positive future for Israel in Dt. 32."

The remarkable poem in Deut 32:1–43 contains both retrospective and prospective elements, but it is unclear what time frame encompasses those elements. There is little agreement among biblical scholars concerning the date of the poem itself or its absolute chronological points of reference.⁴ The general tendency, however, has been to locate the latter either entirely within the biblical period or occasionally as late as the Roman period—a tendency that may be noted in early traditional interpretation as well. Unusually for them, the rabbis did leave an indication of the poem's organization, dividing it into six parts using the acronym *הזיו"ל* (literally, “the splendor is yours”) as a mnemonic. The six units, each one identified by the initial letter of its opening verse, comprise verses 1–6, 7–12, 13–18, 19–26, 27–35, and 36–43, respectively.⁵

Unfortunately, the rabbis left no specific guidelines for the interpretation of the poem according to its structural divisions.⁶ Except for a brief and unelaborated notice in the *Sifre* on Deuteronomy, which Ramban cites (see below), there is scant precedent for the view that the biblical poet was concerned with the distant future.⁷ Ramban changes everything in

4. For the history of scholarship, see Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy* 32, *OtSt* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1–98. More than a century ago, S. R. Driver extolled the Song's “great originality of form, being a presentation of prophetic thoughts in a poetical dress, on a scale which is without parallel in the OT” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895], 345). In a more recent study, (“Why Is The Song of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy?” *VT* 57 [2007]: 295–317), Mark Leuchter comments, “The Song of Moses ... defies any easy attempt at categorization. Alternately viewed as a wisdom meditation, a covenant lawsuit, and a liturgy, most scholars who have examined the poem have come to little consensus concerning its origins” (295).

5. See b. *Rosh Hash.* 31a with Rashi ad loc. According to *Sop.* 12:7, the divisions are vv. 1–6, 7–12, 13–14, 15–28, 29–35, 36–43. See Michael Higger, ed., *Massekhet Soferim* (New York: Deve Rabbanan, 1937), 231–32; see also Higger's notes ad loc. and 21–22, 50 in his introduction.

6. On the application of the acronym to public reading, see, inter alia, Alfasi (*Rif*) on b. *Meg.* 12a; Mordechai on *Megillah* §805; Rambam, *Hilkhot temidin u-musafin* 6:9. Menahem Meiri collects these instructions along with other “scattered words in the Talmud on the subject of Torah reading” in his commentary on b. *Meg.* 25b.

7. Cf., however, Saadia's comment in *Sefer ha-emunot ve-ha-deot* 7 that Deuteronomy reviews the fortunes of the Jews “in order” (Aramaic *עלי נסך* = Hebrew *על סדר*) from their election until the time of the redemption, when the dead will be resurrected. He does not provide historical referents, most likely because his interest is in finding biblical support for belief in resurrection. See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs*

the remarkable appendix to his commentary on Deut 32:40. “This song,” he writes, “which is a true and faithful witness for us, reports explicitly everything that has befallen us.”

By “everything,” Ramban means all of Jewish history from the exodus wanderings up to and including his own time.⁸ “It is clear,” he continues, “that it contains a promise of future redemption,” because the prophecies of universal acclaim for the Jews and vengeance against their enemies in verses 36–43 were not fulfilled in the days of the Second Temple or any time thereafter. The Song, therefore, is a clear, unconditional, and duly witnessed document (שטר עדות)⁹ depicting the forthcoming redemption of the Jews “irrespective of the heretics.”¹⁰ He adduces that one pithy statement from the Sifre for support: “How great is this song, for it includes present, past and future, this world and the world to come.”¹¹ Then Ramban concludes,

and Opinions, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt, YJS 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 267–68. The comment on Deut 32 appears only in the later recension of the treatise, the version that Judah ibn Tibbon translated into Hebrew.

8. Some later interpreters reconcile Ramban’s view of the song with the rabbinic acronym. Thus, for example, the late sixteenth-century commentator Eliezer Ashkenazi (with prooftexts added in square brackets for the sake of clarity): “Moses, peace be upon him, saw what the Israelites had experienced and what they would experience in the future. He wanted to remind them of the past and teach them about the future, and he saw that [those times] could be divided into five successive periods: the first comprises their experiences prior to entering the Land of Israel [‘Remember the days of old’ (v. 7)]; the second the period after their entry [‘He set him atop the highlands’ (v. 13)]; the third the seventy years of the first exile [‘The Lord saw and was vexed’ (v. 19)]; the fourth this miserable exile [‘If not for the taunts of the enemy’ (v. 27)]; and the fifth the messianic era [‘The Lord will vindicate his people, and avenge his servants’ (v. 36)]. Thus did Moses divide it—the first part being his introduction.” See my “An Extraordinary Sixteenth-Century Biblical Commentary: Eliezer Ashkenazi on the Song of Moses,” in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. Barry Walfish, 2 vols. (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 1:129–50.

9. Witnessed by the heavens and the earth, according to Deut 32:1.

10. Cf. Ramban’s commentary on Gen 22:16. Following the near sacrifice of Isaac, God augments the previous promises to Abraham (Gen 13:15; 15:5) with the additional assurance, “your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes,” meaning that their sin will not bring about their destruction. Even if they fall to their enemies, they will rise again, so “this is a complete promise of our future redemption.”

11. Sifre Deut §333 (Louis Finkelstein, ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969], 383), frequently cited by commentators and homilists. See, for example, the elaboration of the midrash in a sixteenth-century

ואלו היתה השירה הזאת מכתב אחד מן החוזים בכוכבים שהגיד מראשית אחרית
 כן, היה ראוי להאמין בה מפני שנתקיימו כל דבריה עד הנה לא נפל דבר אחד,
 ואף כי אנחנו נאמין ונצפה בכל לב לדברי האלהים מפי נביאו הנאמן בכל ביתו.

If this song were the composition of some astrologer who foretold everything from beginning to end, it would be fitting to believe it because its predictions have been fulfilled until now without fail. How much more should we believe and expect wholeheartedly the fulfillment of God's words as uttered by his faithful and intimate prophet.

While the diaspora itself is the culmination of God's just punishment of the Jews for their sins, their suffering at the hands of the nations, according to Ramban, is not part of the divine scheme of things. The nations' hatred, rather, is motivated by their anger at the Jews' refusal to adopt their ways. The Jews "serve God and observe his commandments, do not intermarry with them and do not eat their food, despise their idolatry and extirpate it from their places," suffering martyrdom as a result. The nations' grievous mistreatment of the Jews induces God to regard the nations as *his* enemies, against whom he will wreak vengeance.

Ramban's typological reading of the poem requires little elaboration.¹² When he writes about those who oppress the Jews "only because [the Jews] will not do as they do" and who heretically deny the possibility of Jewish redemption, he can be referring only to contemporary Christians. He will not even allow for the possibility that the Christians are the agents of divine judgment; they are no more than enemies of God, soon to be wiped out. Their destruction, moreover, like the salvation of the Jews, is not contingent on anything: it has been foretold and will occur without fail.

It would be hard to overstate the impact of Ramban's interpretation on subsequent Jewish commentary. From the middle of the thirteenth century

sermon by Solomon le-vet ha-Levi: "[The Song] alludes in a general way to everything that has befallen us: the beneficence and goodness; the sins that we have committed, and the punishments that have come upon us because of them; the endurance of the nation in spite of dreadful hardships; and the good that we expect and hope for in the end" (*Divre Shelomoh* [Venice: Zanetti, 1596], 293d). Similarly, Moses Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur*: after citing the Sifre, Mendelssohn comments that the more an intelligent reader ponders the poem, the more astonishing it is to realize that it foretells everything that has befallen the Jewish people. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Sefer netivot shalom* [on Deuteronomy] (Vienna: Schmid, 1837), 165b; see also Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim (Deuteronomy)* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980), 327–39.

12. On Ramban's view of history and use of typology, see Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 98–121.

onward, the tendency is to view the Song of Moses as a depiction of Jewish history in its entirety, from the initial election of the Jews through their ultimate redemption. Bahya ben Asher, a second-generation disciple of Ramban, expands the scope of the Song to encompass everything from the creation of the world to the messianic era, in his commentary on Deut 32:1:

ודע כי כלל הפרשה הזאת שהיה משה מתוכח לישראל ומגיד להם מראשית אחרית ואת כל הקורות אותם לעתיד, והתחיל מבריאת העולם וסיים בענין ימות המשיח.

Know that in this parashah, in which Moses reproves Israel, he tells them the story from beginning to end, including everything that will happen to them in the future, beginning with the creation of the world and concluding with the messianic era.

Later commentators, as we shall see, offer more detailed or differently nuanced readings while retaining the basic hermeneutical frame.

Two centuries following Ramban's death, on the eve of the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the great homilist Isaac Arama (d. 1494) was still expecting the imminent redemption of the Jews based on the promise of the Song. "How elegant were the words of Ramban," he wrote (מה נמלצו) in commending wholehearted faith in Moses's prophecy. The statement comes toward the end of chapter 103 of Arama's magisterial *Aqedat Yitshaq*, a collection of homilies that were preached in Spain during the final years prior to the Expulsion, many of them explicit retorts to Christian sermons that Jews were forced to attend.

Arama's sermon on Deut 32 is a tour de force treating a wide range of topics, including divine justice, the relationship between God's omniscience and human free will, the nature of providence, and the purpose and meaning of Israel's suffering. The theme of the Song of Moses, he states, is that

אנו חייבים לגדלו ולהודות לפניו על יושר דינו... אשר יסופר בשירה הזאת הכולל כל תלאות האומה הזאת וקורותיה עד סוף כל הדורות וכל יעודי התורה האלהית בפרט על דרך השכר והעונש המונחי' על יסוד חפשויות הבחירה המוחלטת.

we must glorify and thank God for his upright judgment ... as reported in this song, which contains all the vicissitudes and happenings of this people to the end of all generations and all of the promises of the divine Torah with respect to reward and punishment premised on free will.

Arama begins by establishing the Maimonidean theological principle that undergirds his argument: God's omniscience does not dictate the course

of events; their occurrence is within God's knowledge, but his knowledge does not determine their occurrence.¹³ "Would you requite the LORD for this, impious and unwise people?" Moses asks rhetorically in Deut 32:6, and Arama comments, "It is a fact that you are responsible for your own actions since free will was given to you with no compulsion." The Jews suffer justly on account of their own folly and transgressions and cannot blame God for their behavior.

While the wretched condition of the Jews is a result of their defection from God, it in no way suggests God's abandonment of them. On the contrary, Israel's punishment is a sign of God's continuing providential care: "If occasionally God disciplines or reproves them 'with the rod of men and the affliction of mortals' [2 Sam 7:14]," Arama writes,

לא יהיה רק לטובתם ללמדם ולהדריךם בדרך ילכו.... כמו שהיה הענין בשלוח אותם למצרים ע"י גלגוליהם לצרפם שם וטרם יחמץ בצקם מיהר לפרוש עליהם כנפי רחמנותו וישא אותם על כנפי נשרים והביא אותם אליו וכן הוא הענין בכל שאר התלאות והגלויות.

it is solely for their own good, to instruct them and to direct them on the path that they should follow.... Thus God sent them to Egypt on account of their idolatry, to refine them there, and before their dough could rise, he hastened to spread his merciful wings over them and bore them off on eagles' wings [Deut 32:11]. *And that is the case with all other travails and exiles.*

The concluding sentence, which I have emphasized, indicates Arama's effort to apply the example of the exodus to his contemporary situation.

The human agents responsible for Israel's condition hubristically think that they are in control, "ascribing to themselves power that they do not possess." If they had any sense, however, they would know otherwise: "Were they wise, they would realize this" (Deut 32:29). Arama reprises a rabbinic debate between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemiah¹⁴ about whether the pronoun in verse 32 ("the vine for *them* is from Sodom") refers to Israel or the nations, concluding that it must be the latter.¹⁵ The verse therefore condemns the nations for the false belief that their temporary ascendancy

13. See T. M. Rudavsky, *Maimonides* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 143–60.

14. Sifre Deut §323 (ed. Finkelstein, 373–74).

15. Cf. the similar debate about the identity of the subject of the verbs in v. 29. Generally Israel in earlier sources (Targum Yerushalmi, Sifre Deuteronomy and par-

is the result of their own actions, “the way those two well-known clans [Christians and Muslims, obviously] among which the exiles of Israel are scattered boast.” Even Sennacherib, in contrast, was willing to ascribe his success to God (2 Kgs 18:25)!

The nations are doomed, and the redemption of the Jews is at hand; Deut 32:43 signifies this reversal of fortunes. While the nations formerly exulted in Israel’s downfall, now, having experienced God’s vengeful wrath, they will have to extol God’s restored people. Moses’s prophecy guarantees that both the vengeance and the restoration will occur without fail. “And now,” Arama summarizes, “the continuity of the song has been properly explained,” entailing

כל הקורות אותנו בכל המשך הזמנים הרבים שעברו מראש ועד סוף הכל צפוי וגלוי לפנינו ית' ולא עוד אלא מכון ממנו להביאנו על פי דרכנו אל תכלית הנסיונות אשר בהם ימול לבבנו הערל ונקום ונחיה לפניו מבלי נפול עוד אל החטאים והמרדים שהיו רגילין בהם.

everything that has befallen us all through time from beginning to end, all of it foreseen by and revealed to God and, moreover, intended by him to bring us to the end of our trials, through which our uncircumcised hearts will be circumcised, and we will arise and live in God’s presence without falling into sin and rebellion as in the past.

In conclusion, Arama cites Ramban, emphasizing the fact that the promise of salvation to the Jews is unconditional.¹⁶ The miserable experience of exile itself seems to be all the repentance that is required of the Jews. In his words, “The matter depends only on the exile making the same impression on our hearts that it does on our honor and wealth.”

The same quotation from Ramban that appears in Arama’s sermon also turns up in the conclusion of Isaac Abarbanel’s commentary on the Song of Moses. Abarbanel even introduces the quotation with the same words (“How elegant were the words of Ramban”), a discomfiting reminder of the charge of plagiarism that Arama’s son leveled against

allels), but some later commentators, including Sforno, Malbim, and Netziv, opt for the nations.

16. Cf. Abraham Saba, *Tseror ha-mor* on Deut 32:36. He offers several reasons for God to act on behalf of the Jews despite their lack of merit (זכות): out of love, on account of the merit of the ancestors, or for the sake of the few righteous among them (so also Sforno ad loc.). “The sense of all this,” Saba concludes, is “that God discerns that the time for their redemption has arrived, as alluded to in the Torah.”

Abarbanel.¹⁷ Other than that brief quotation and a few other incidental details, however, there is little to suggest Abarbanel's dependence on Arama as opposed to their mutual reliance on Ramban and their parallel responses to similar circumstances.

Abarbanel's commentary on Deuteronomy was some twenty years in the making.¹⁸ He began the project while still living in Portugal in the 1470s, abandoning it because of worsening conditions and the call to public service and losing track of it when he fled Portugal in 1483. He was able to complete it only after the Expulsion when, while living in Corfu in 1495, he serendipitously came upon a copy of his draft. Thus inspired to return to the writing, he finished the commentary the following year.

Abarbanel establishes the historical frame for his discussion of Deut 32 in his commentary on Deut 30:1, which begins with the words, "When all these things befall you." The concluding portion of Deuteronomy includes prophecies for the future (הפרשה הזאת עתידה לבא)—prophecies that were *not* fulfilled in the days of the First or Second Temple (לא נתקיימו). As Eric Lawee observes, statements such as this one reflect Abarbanel's intention "to thwart the view that had circulated among the Jews since the early Middle Ages ... that most if not all scriptural promises of redemption had been realized during the second Jewish commonwealth."¹⁹

On the contrary, the Torah offers "our comfort and hope, the cure for all our hardships," as Abarbanel puts it. He urges the Jews not to despair (שלא יתיאשו בלבם), a common refrain in post-Expulsion commentary and homily. The continuation of Deut 30 depicts the ingathering of the exiles, "and that is the true comfort, the future redemption that we expect," Abarbanel writes. This redemption, he argues on the basis of his close reading of verses 2–4, will encompass not only the small minority of Jews who remained true to their faith but even those who converted "because of the hardships and weight of the exile and the compulsion of persecutions."

17. See Joseph R. Hacker, "Rabbi Meir Arama's Letter of Censure against Isaac Abravanel: A Riddle Solved" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 76 (2007): 501–18.

18. See Shnayer Z. Leiman, "Abarbanel and the Censor," *JJS* 19 (1968): 49–61; Avishai Shotland, ed., *Devarim*, vol. 5 of *Perush ha-torah le-Rabbenu Yitshaq Abarbanel* (Jerusalem: Horev, 1999), 5–6.

19. Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 141.

Abarbanel's interpretation of Deut 32 is one of the masterpieces of traditional Jewish biblical commentary, and it is hardly possible to do full justice to it in this brief essay. Fortunately, Abarbanel derives a summary of his own from his detailed explanation of the text, introducing it with the words, "We may derive seven principles of our faith (ז' כללים באמונתנו) from the words of this song." These principles, as one might expect, cluster around the same themes that we have observed already in the writings of Ramban and Arama. I would summarize the summary as follows, for the most part in Abarbanel's own words, with his prooftexts from the Song and elsewhere in parentheses:

1. "Vengeance against and recompense of those who afflict us will occur of necessity" (Deut 32:35, 41–43).
2. "Vengeance against the enemies and the redemption of Israel will occur at a set and determined time, decreed by divine wisdom, unalterable, but not revealed to any creature" (v. 34).
3. "The redemption of Israel will take place when, in accordance with justice, 'her sin is remitted and her transgression expiated' (Isa 40:2)" (v. 36).
4. "In this exile of ours we no longer benefit from the merit of our ancestors ... and we attain rescue from the nations only for the sake of God's great name" (vv. 27, 37–39).
5. "The resurrection of the dead will be proximate in time to the ingathering of the exiles" (vv. 36, 39).
6. [Quoting and paraphrasing Ramban:] "The redemption and expiation that this song promises are contingent neither upon repentance nor on our obeying God and observing the commandments. Rather, this song is a duly witnessed document stating that we will do innumerable evil and sinful things, that God will angrily reprove us with many punishments but will not efface our memory from the world, and that afterwards God ... will relent and requite the enemies with a mighty sword, 'taking us back in love and expiating our sins' (Mic 7:19). And therefore this song is an explicit promise of future redemption, irrespective of the heretics."
7. [Again paraphrasing and citing Ramban:] "Since the promises of this song have been fulfilled [so far] without exception ... it is fitting that we believe with absolute trust that

the last part [vv. 36–43] will be fulfilled as well, namely, the redemption and vengeance against the enemies.”

Even that brief summary makes it clear that Abarbanel’s interpretation perpetuates the antisupersessionist themes that we have noted. Divine favor has not been transferred away from the Jews. Their suffering is a mark not of divine abandonment but of God’s continuing providential concern for them. The end of that suffering, coupled with the abasement of their oppressors, has been determined and prophesied since ancient times; it will happen at a predetermined time known only to God, irrespective of any human action. Finally, belief in the inevitability of that 180-degree reversal of fortunes is the primary source of Jewish comfort and hope.

I would like to draw attention to three details of Abarbanel’s commentary of particular relevance in this context. The first has to do with the nature of the sin that brought about all the suffering in the first place. It takes only a nodding acquaintance with biblical and postbiblical literature to know that in general terms idolatry is the most grievous of sins, yielding the harshest punishment. But what is the nature of the idolatry in this case?

When Abarbanel comes to the verse with which I began this paper, “they incensed me with nongods, vexed me with their idols” (v. 21), he relates it to transgressions of the Second Temple period, although it quickly becomes apparent that he is using the historical mode of expression as a cover for addressing contemporary issues. The first part of his comment is garbled by censorship,²⁰ but its thrust becomes clear in the sequel. He writes:

על אנשי בית שני, שהם כעסו את ה' באמונת ... שהיה בסוף בית שני, ובי-
מיהם נבנתה, ומאנשיהם היו המיסדים אותה. והיה הכעס המופלג בתתם ויחסם
... שהיא הגדולה שבקנאות. וכן כעסו את ה' בהבליהם, שהם שלוחיו ומלאכיו,
שנעשו קדושים ונביאים, והיו כלם מאותם הפריצים שבבית שני. ונמשך אחר זה
עבודת העצבים והפסילים אשר נעשו לזכרונם, שהם הבלים באמת.

20. The first printed edition of Abarbanel’s Deuteronomy commentary (Sabbioneta, 1551, published under the title *Merkevet ha-mishnah*) included the unexpurgated text of the commentary. Copies were heavily censored (see the appendix below for an example). See Leiman, “Abarbanel and the Censor,” 60–61 on the specific text under discussion. The offending passages were omitted from the first printing of Abarbanel’s complete Torah commentary (Venice, 1579), which served as the basis for subsequent printings, including Bar-Ilan’s digital text. I have cited the text from Shotland, *Devarim*, 519. He discusses the matter of censorship in his introduction, 9–10.

Concerning the people of the Second Temple period: they vexed God with the religion of [...] at the end of the period. In their days it was constructed, and some of them were its founders. And it was the most extreme vexation in that they assigned and attributed [...], the greatest of vexations. And thus they vexed God with their nonsense [cf. v. 21]. His apostles and emissaries, who were made out to be prophets and saints, all were from among those degenerates of the Second Temple period. What followed was worship of sculptures and statues that were made in their memory, and they are truly nonsense.

Greater clarity than that excerpt provides probably is not required, but in case it is, the less heavily censored continuation supplies it.

Abarbanel (following Ramban) observes that from the beginning of the Song until verse 21 Moses speaks in his own voice, referring to God in the third-person. Verse 20 introduces direct quotation of God with **וַיֹּאמֶר**, and for the rest of the Song God speaks in the first-person. The transition, Abarbanel suggests, is because

נתינת האלהות לבשר ודם, היא היתה הקנאה הגדולה והעצומה לפניו יתעלה.
ascribing divinity to flesh and blood [a phrase that recurs several times in this passage] is the greatest possible vexation of God.

In other words, God is so profoundly offended that it is not enough for Moses to speak for God; rather, God must speak and act on his own behalf against the Christian heresy. All the sins that the Jews ever committed were lightweight (קלים) in comparison with the gravest one of all, “that you would say that I, the creator of the world, am flesh and blood like you.” That is what kindles God’s “burning anger” in verse 22.

According to verses 26–27, God considered destroying the Jews outright but instead consigned them to their enemies. In so doing, God sent them into exile all over the world. Even the exile, for Abarbanel, reflects God’s ongoing care for the Jews. It is not only because exile was a milder form of punishment than destruction. In addition, as he puts it,

בהיות ישראל כלו יחד בפאה אחת כאשר יגבר האויב עליה' באף ובחמה יוכל לכלותם מעל פני האדמה כמו שחשב לעשות אחשוורוש.... בהיות' מפוזרים בכל הפאות אף שיבעס עליהם מלך אחד יחמול עליהם מלך אחר ויברחו מגוי אל גוי ומממלכה אל עם אחר. בהיות שמה מאחיהם.

If the Jews all were together in one corner of the world, an enemy who ruled over them wrathfully would be able to wipe all of them off the face of the earth, as Ahasuerus intended to do ... but while they are scattered

to all corners, if one king becomes angry with them another king will show compassion, and they might flee from nation to nation and from one kingdom to another, finding some of their fellow Jews there.

Thus the Torah becomes not only the (literal) road map of the Jewish people but of Abarbanel's own life as well.

Finally, in his commentary on verses 29 and following, Abarbanel reiterates and amplifies one of Arama's main themes: the fate of the Jews is exclusively in God's hands. For the nations to think otherwise is folly and hubris: "Were they wise, they would realize this." What they must realize is that the condition of the Jews represents God's providential punishment (בעונש השגחתו היה זה) and has nothing to do with their own capability. There is no power inherent in their deities that could have overcome the might of Israel's god (v. 31), and they possess no virtue that would justify their ascendancy (vv. 32–33). Judgment is at hand, however, and it will take place as prophesied (vv. 34–36). It has not yet arrived only because, in Abarbanel's words,²¹

שעם היות שהאומות יתחייבו כפי רוע מעשיהם מכת חרב וחנק ואבדן, הנה ה' יתעלה יאריך עליהם, בעוד שישאל אינם ראויים להגאל, ובעבור חטאתם האריך אפו לאויביהם.

although for their evil deeds the nations ought to incur the sword, strangulation, and destruction, God delays punishment for them because Israel is not yet worthy of redemption: on account of [Israel's] sin, God delays the punishment of their enemies.

In Abarbanel's commentary and the other writings that we have surveyed here, there is more than a trace of what Gilbert Murray, in his classic book, *Four* (subsequently *Five*) *Stages of Greek Religion*, memorably dubbed "the failure of nerve."²² What underlies the sensibility of these authors living under duress seems to be a profound pessimism, which Murray described as "a loss of self-confidence, of hope in this life and of faith in normal human effort; a despair of patient inquiry, a cry for infal-

21. Cited from Shotland, *Devarim*, 524. Although the passage was not censored in my copy of the Sabbioneta edition (111b), it was omitted from subsequent editions, including Bar-Ilan's.

22. Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London: Watts, 1935), 123–70, here 123.

libile revelation.”²³ Human action seems irrelevant, and it makes little sense to rely on other people. The only alternative for the Jews is to turn to God in the belief that God’s ancient promise to the Jewish people, which Moses had delivered in God’s name with heaven and earth as witnesses, was due to be fulfilled at last. Through their “burning faith” (another of Murray’s felicitous terms), Ramban and his followers seek to fan that spark of hope into a blaze of certainty that redemption is at hand. The centuries of Jewish suffering and martyrdom must be on the verge of yielding to a better world, one in which the irredeemably unworthy will be redeemed, the unpardonably sinful will be pardoned, and those immediately responsible for so much of that suffering, who fail to recognize that they are mere bit players in the drama of Jewish salvation, will be held to account once and for all.

23. On the lack of direction and loss of confidence among Iberian Jews immediately prior to and following the Expulsion, see Joseph R. Hacker, “The Responses of the Exiles to the Spanish Expulsion and to the Forced Conversion in Portugal” [Hebrew], in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, ed. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1999), 223–45.

Appendix: Censored Page from the Sabbioneta 1551 Edition
of Abarbanel's Commentary on Deut 32:21²⁴

האזיב

עושים עד הנה אולי שישבו ממנו כי דור תחפכות ומה
זה משתנים בעצמם כל דורם ואולי יתחרטו במה שהן
עושין עתה וישובו מדרך הרעים ואלה אחרים אפי' להם
ואסתין אולי ישובו והיו אמרו אראת מה אחרים כי דור
תחפכות ומה מתחפכים ומשתנים בעניניהם בני לא אמן
בם' רל' און קיום והעברה ואמונה במה שיעשו וגם שהם
חשבו אמרנו ואולי ישתלמו בה דבר שלא נשתנו ולא
נחלמו מות ממשיהם אבל זה דבר שער הסיפור סרה
בה הנה בוסן בית ראשון קנאוני בלא אל' לל בעכסם הנה
והשירים שלא חיו אלו או שהיו בכח השירים אלה והאומרים
לא אל' כבו שאמר בחשו ב' ויאמרו לא הוא ואמנם בוסן
בית שני ים תות שלא קנאוני בלא א כי לא היו עובדים על
אנן בעצמנו בהבליהם ומעשיהם המבוללים והרופ' ומכל
ממשי ואפשר לפרש הם קנאוני בלא אל' בעצמנו בהבליהם
על אנשי בית שני

וכן היה מהראוי שלא אהנינו עמם עוד בהסתר פנים
אבל שאמרנו לים מורה כנור מרה' כי אם אנשי בית
ראשון קנאוני בלא אלה נם אני אקנאם בלא עם
וענין כן שהם חכמים כמו שאמר דן ארץ כשרים זה העם לא זה
ואם אנשי בית שני כעצמי בהבליהם נם אני בניו נכל
אנשים' וכבר כתב חכמינו משה בר נחמני שה נאמר
על נכל ולא נכר ביה אחרים ויהי נראת לפרש
ומה הער קרא

וכן דרשו בספרי בלא עם אל' חכמים וכן הוא
אומר ושמעו צדי יהודה' והתכל כי מחלת השירה
אמר נכל בלא און אלהים' והתכל כי מחלת השירה
עד הם קנאוני בלא אל' דבר משה בשמו' כאלו הוא היה
המדר' והאל' ית' והוא היה קנאה הנדולה והעצומה לפניו ית' ולכן
זכר חכמים והאל' כאלו השם יתברך בעצמו אמרם
לקנאוני' והיו שאמר כי אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר
שעל הדבר הזה הוא בית' שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
בבית שני אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
אבל נם יאכל ארץ ויבולה שכל ארץ ישראל תקול על און
ותלחט מוסרי חרים שדמו לירושלים כדברי רש'

עושים עד הנה אולי שישבו ממנו כי דור תחפכות ומה
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נחלמו מות ממשיהם אבל זה דבר שער הסיפור סרה
בה הנה בוסן בית ראשון קנאוני בלא אל' לל בעכסם הנה
והשירים שלא חיו אלו או שהיו בכח השירים אלה והאומרים
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אמר נכל בלא און אלהים' והתכל כי מחלת השירה
עד הם קנאוני בלא אל' דבר משה בשמו' כאלו הוא היה
המדר' והאל' ית' והוא היה קנאה הנדולה והעצומה לפניו ית' ולכן
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לקנאוני' והיו שאמר כי אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר
שעל הדבר הזה הוא בית' שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
בבית שני אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
אבל נם יאכל ארץ ויבולה שכל ארץ ישראל תקול על און
ותלחט מוסרי חרים שדמו לירושלים כדברי רש'

וכן דרשו בספרי בלא עם אל' חכמים וכן הוא
אומר ושמעו צדי יהודה' והתכל כי מחלת השירה
אמר נכל בלא און אלהים' והתכל כי מחלת השירה
עד הם קנאוני בלא אל' דבר משה בשמו' כאלו הוא היה
המדר' והאל' ית' והוא היה קנאה הנדולה והעצומה לפניו ית' ולכן
זכר חכמים והאל' כאלו השם יתברך בעצמו אמרם
לקנאוני' והיו שאמר כי אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר
שעל הדבר הזה הוא בית' שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
בבית שני אש קרה באפי רוצה לומר שישנה נקמה בבני אדם
אבל נם יאכל ארץ ויבולה שכל ארץ ישראל תקול על און
ותלחט מוסרי חרים שדמו לירושלים כדברי רש'

והתחפכותם שמישהם ארץ ואל' :

אמרת אפאיהםנו' עד הלא הוא כמס

עמדי תו'

זהו החלוקה שמישהם ארץ ואל' :
שחשבה השם יתברך על עמו לעשות בהם כליה'
ולמה חור מאות משכבה' והמפרשים פירשו
אפאיהם אפרים בכל המאות' ואני אחשוב שיהא
בהפך כי זהו ארצנו נפדנו בכל המאות ואין נחמים לולא
בעם ארבי אנד' אבל פירוש אפאיהם' אמרתי
לשום בפאה אחת כד' שאשכיה מאנש וזכרם כמו שהיה
מעין עשרת המכשפים שחולד' מלך אשור לחלח חביו
שלא נדע עד מהם דבר באות מקום הם' ואין מסק
שלה עצמו בנות רחשני וגוונם לזכרה באמרים בספרי'
שתיבה זו נחלקת לשלשה תבות אף אי הם שלחיותם
בפאה מפתות השוכן ויהי וזכר ויאמרו אף הם וזהו לא
ישאר לחם שם ושארית כין בני אדם' לולי שנכנעתי מות
לפי

24. From <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=42539&pgnum=220>.

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Targumic Wordplay

Isaac Gottlieb

There are many opinions as to what qualifies as a play on words. I would like to adopt a definition formulated by the late Victor Hurowitz: “The term [wordplay] actually is a general one, applied to several distinct literary or rhetorical devices such as alliteration, paronomasia, double-entendre, pol-ysemy, name etymology, Leitwort, and pun.”¹

If one takes wordplay in the broad sense that Hurowitz did, examples can be found in almost every book of the Hebrew Bible. Many of these have been recorded and defined. In a doctoral thesis completed in 1892 and published in 1894, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, Immanuel M. Casanowicz collected more than five hundred examples.² Further studies by Edward L. Greenstein, Gary A. Rendsburg, and Jack M. Sasson have sharpened our understanding of wordplays.³

One is impressed by the frequency of the occurrences. The very first words in the Pentateuch, בראשית ברא, repeat the same three letters, *bet resh aleph*. In the very next verse in Genesis, the phrase ורוח אלוהים מרחפת repeats two root letters, *resh* and *het*, turning the words into wordplay. Two verses later we find a further case of alliteration, וירא אלהים את האור. It is important to note that Casanowicz specifically excludes the first two words in Genesis from his list, claiming that the repeated sounds were not

1. Victor A. Hurowitz, “Alliterative Allusions, Rebus Writing, and Paronomastic Punishment: Some Aspects of Word Play in Akkadian Literature,” in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), 63.

2. Immanuel M. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament* (Boston: Cushing, 1894).

3. Edward L. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” *ABD* 6:968–71; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 137–62; Jack M. Sasson, “Wordplay in the Old Testament,” *IDBSup*, 968–70.

intentional but rather “unavoidable coincidence.”⁴ However, *pace* Casanowicz, one may assume that the letter *bet* was added to the first word, ראשית, precisely in order to create alliteration.⁵

Of particular interest to me are the bilingual puns, in which the play relies on one word that has separate meanings in two languages. Here are two of the best known examples: Hebrew *ra* means bad, evil; in the verse ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם (Exod 10:10) Pharaoh warns Moses and Aaron that evil awaits them. In Egyptian, *ra* is the sun god. Therefore the verse may also mean, “Ra, the Egyptian sun god, stands in your way.”⁶ In a second example, the word צופיה in Prov 31:27 describes the woman of valor. צופיה הליכות means, “She oversees the running of her household,” the Hebrew root being צפה. But צופיה may also be read as Greek σοφία, Wisdom. The verse would then mean: “The ways of her household are wise.” As we are dealing with wisdom literature, this seems to be an intended bilingual pun.⁷

Both these examples are cited by Rendsburg, who notes that “exegetes should be on the lookout for other such instances” of bilingual puns, including some between Hebrew and Aramaic.⁸ In a later paper Rendsburg supplied one such example himself: Jonah 3:7 המלך וגדוליו מטעם means “by decree of the king and his nobles.” The word טעם “decree” in that verse is an Aramaism, the Hebrew equivalent of Aramaic טעם “decree.” The verse then spells out the decree: “No human or beast shall taste anything,” אל

4. “To fall under the definition of paronomasia as an artifice of style, the similarity of sound must be manifestly designed by the author, not the result of an unavoidable coincidence, as, for instance, the first words of the Old Testament בראשית ברא, or the beginning of the Psalter, אשרי האיש אשר” (Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 26). But Gen 1:1 happens to be Rendsburg’s first example of wordplay (“Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 137), and Yair Zakovitch (*The Song of Songs* [Hebrew] Mikra Leyisrael [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992], 24) illustrates alliteration by means of the opening verse of the Song of Songs, שיר השירים, אשר לשלמה, which appears to be no different from the opening of Psalms rejected by Casanowicz.

5. ה' קנני could have stood alone with similar meaning, compare Prov 8:22, ראשית דרכי.

6. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible,” VT 38 (1988): 354; “J. Seliger, J. Bloch, S. Rosenblatt, and U. Cassuto all have noted this pun.”

7. Al Wolters, “Šōpiyyā (Prov 31:27) as Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia,” JBL 104 (1985): 577–87.

8. Rendsburg, “Bilingual Wordplay,” 356.

יִטְעֵמוּ מֵאוֹמָה. The same three letters טעם in Aramaic mean “decree” and in Hebrew “to taste,” giving us an ideal bilingual pun.⁹

The above examples of alliteration, punning, and bilingual plays in the Hebrew Bible led me to consider whether I could find wordplay in the Aramaic Bible translations as well. To begin, I chose to examine Targum Onqelos on the Pentateuch.¹⁰ However, I soon encountered what might seem to be a serious obstacle to my search: scholars have pointed out that Targum Onqelos and the Targums in general “eliminated picturesque expressions, idioms, metaphors, and poetic images” from their translations.¹¹ The reason for this was to assure that the populace would understand the biblical verse clearly. Casanowicz had earlier noted that “paronomasia in the Old Testament is, like all other embellishments of speech, an element of higher style.”¹² Many variations from the literal Hebrew text found in Targum Onqelos were subsequently explained by scholars as an attempt to simplify figurative speech. Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) in his book *גֵּר אֹהֶב* stated that Targum Onqelos wrote for the masses, not the learned. The educated reader might enjoy figurative language, but the very same, wrote Luzzatto, was “a trap and a snare” for the masses. Onqelos, he concluded, added words to his text in order to explain the intention of metonymy, metaphor, and simile in the Hebrew, while omitting the literal translation of such figures of speech.¹³

John F. Stenning, who published *The Targum of Isaiah* from Yemenite manuscripts, concurred: “Since the main object of the Targumist was to render the Hebrew original intelligible to the ordinary people it is not surprising to find that its chief characteristic is the use of paraphrase.”¹⁴ It therefore seemed to me that literary devices of the sort included in the

9. Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 142. The bilingual aspect of this play was not noted by Baruch Halpern and Richard Elliot Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” *HAR* 4 (1980): 83.

10. English translations of the MT are from the NJPS. Translations of Targum Onqelos on Genesis are taken from Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1982). Translations of Targum Onqelos on Exodus are taken from Israel Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Exodus* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1990).

11. Yehuda Komlosh, *The Bible in the Light of the Aramaic Translations* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1973), 230.

12. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 41.

13. Samuel David Luzzatto, *Ohev Ger* [Hebrew] (Cracow: Fischer, 1895), 1, 6, 16–17.

14. John F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), xii.

category of wordplay would not be found in the Targum literature. After all, Targum did not aim to provide an aesthetic experience for the sophisticated reader; its goal was a utilitarian and straightforward translation that would serve synagogue goers who could not understand the Hebrew Torah reading.¹⁵

However, when I found in Onkelos what looked like a bilingual Hebrew-Aramaic play in the second chapter of Genesis, I took this to be an encouraging sign. Indeed, further study showed me that wordplay is present in the Targums. I shall begin with the bilingual example I found and proceed to point out a variety of wordplays found in Targum Onkelos, ending with some examples from the Targum to Prophets and Writings.

1. Genesis 2:1–2

MT

ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם
ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה.

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array.

On the seventh day God finished the work that he had been doing.

Targum Onkelos

ואשתכללו שמיא וארעא וכל חיליהון.
ושיצי יי ביומא שביעאה עבדיתה דעבד.

And the heaven and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.

And on the seventh day the Lord finished His work which He had done.

ויכולו and ויכל are both from the root בלה, “to complete.” Both verbs are identically translated in the NJPS as “finished.” Targum Onkelos translates the first as אשתכללו, literally “to complete, form, or finish,” a loanword from Akkadian used in Biblical Aramaic and Targum Onkelos for completing a building.¹⁶ The second word, ויכל, Targum Onkelos renders with the word שיצי, “to destroy, finish,” in place of שכלל.¹⁷ Aberbach and

15. It is assumed that Targum Onkelos was written around the third century CE when the spoken language of Jews in Palestine and the East was Aramaic.

16. Forms of שכלל (*shaphel* conjugation) are used in this sense five times in Ezra 4, 5, and 6.

17. The word שיצי in Biblical Aramaic is likewise a *shaphel* borrowing from Akkadian; see Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1968), 52–53. BDB: “complete, put an end to,” passive “be finished.”

Grossfeld, in their edition and translation of Targum Onqelos on Genesis, wonder why two different words, **שיצי** and **אשתכללו**, were chosen to translate **ויכלו** and **ויכל**.¹⁸

Their question is actually the key to understanding if what we have before us is a case of wordplay. As we have seen above, it was already a matter of debate regarding the first two words of Genesis, **בראשית ברא**. Do we have before us authorial intent to render a play on words or chance alliteration?¹⁹ In the current example, the fact that two different words could have been used to translate the identical Hebrew root **כלה** means that the author had to choose which word he would use for each occurrence. If the author could have used a different word in place of the one he actually chose and the word he did choose resulted in a pun, it must then be considered a play on words rather than “chance alliteration.”

In answer to Aberbach and Grossfeld, the bilingual Hebrew-Aramaic alliteration **אשתכללו-ויכלו** seems to be an intentional play because Targum could have used **שיצי** in place of **אשתכללו** to translate **ויכלו** as well.²⁰

The next case is a name midrash, one of the more frequent types of wordplays in the Hebrew Bible.

2. Genesis 4:26

MT

ולשת גם הוא ילד בן ויקרא את שמו אנוש אז הוחל לקרא בשם ה'

And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.

Targum Onqelos

וקרא ית שמיה אנוש בכין ביומוהי חלו בני אנשא מלצלאה בשמא דיי

And as for Seth, to him also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. Then in his days the sons of man were lax in praying in the name of the Lord.

In taking **הוחל** as “were lax, weak” from the root **חול**, or else “profaned” from the root **חלל**, Targum Onqelos is following a midrashic line of

18. Aberbach and Grossfeld, *Onkelos to Genesis*, 26–27 n.

19. See note 4 above.

20. Indeed, the Hebrew **כלה** is translated by Aramaic **שיציא** in Gen 41:30: **שיציא** כפנא for **וכלה הרעב**, “the land will be ravaged or consumed by famine.”

Judging by the examples I have gathered, the most basic form of word-play is alliteration.²² Here is one such case among many.²³

MT

But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot and returned to him to the ark.

ותבת לותיה לתיבותא

The word **ותבת** derives from the root **תוב**, “to return”; **תבותא** means “ark.” In addition, **לותיה** is phonetically similar to the other two words, so we have a triple alliteration.

4. Genesis 24:22

MT

The man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel.

22. "The form of word play least laden with meaning is alliteration or euphony, in which sounds are repeated a number of times in close proximity" (Hurowitz, "Alliterative Allusions," 67). Unlike modern definitions of the term, it does not refer to identical sounds at the beginning of words only.

23. Other examples: Gen 2:2 עבדתיך דעבד, Exod 18:21 דחילא דחילא, Exod 22:22 קבלא אקבל קבלתיה, Num13:22 וותמן אחימן, Deut 8:15 בדברך במדברא, Deut 21:18 תועבתהון-טעותהון.

Targum Onqelos

תקלא מתקליה

The weight of which was a shekel

A בקע is a half-shekel, as defined in Exod 38:26: **בקע לגלגלת מחצית השקל**: “A בקע a head, half a shekel by the sanctuary weight.” Targum Onqelos did not disagree with this meaning, as he himself used the word **שקל** to translate בקע in Exod 38:26, where clearly the coin is a half-shekel. Aberbach and Grossfeld explain the use of shekel instead of half-shekel as based on rabbinic coinage in the talmudic period, when the Targum was written.²⁴ It seems to me that Onqelos may have translated **בקע משקלו** as **תקלא מתקליה** (= Hebrew **משקלו**) for the sake of alliteration.

The next case is unique: a pun in Aramaic that translates a pun in the Hebrew text. *Prima facie*, this seems well-nigh impossible,²⁵ but the following translation succeeds.

5. Genesis 31:49

MT

והמצפה אשר אמר יצף ה' ביני ובינך כי נסתר איש מרעהו

And [it was called] Mizpah, because he said, “May the LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of sight of each other.”

Targum Onqelos

וסכותא די אמר יסך מימרא דה' ביני ובינך ארי נתכסי גבר מחבריה.

As for the watchpost, [it was so named] because he said, “Let the Memra of the Lord watch between me and you when we are out of sight from each other.”

In the Hebrew text, this is a name midrash, albeit a place-name etymology rather than a personal one.²⁶ The Hebrew root **צפה** means “to watch,” and

24. Aberbach and Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 141 n. 6.

25. In general, wordplay “is rarely captured in translation” (Greenstein, “Word-play, Hebrew,” 968).

26. “There is, as it were, an innate desire in everyone to etymologize; ... the explanation of proper names, or the connecting of things and events with the signification of names, are the favorite field of this tendency” (Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 17). See Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1991).

מצפה is a noun derived from this root that means “watchtower.” Targum Onqelos translated מצפה as סכותא, Aramaic for watchtower, from the root סכי, meaning “to see.” He then used a verbal form of the same root to say יסך: “May the Lord watch over (between) us.” The reason he did this was to create wordplay in Aramaic that would be the equivalent of the Hebrew wordplay: Hebrew יצף-מצפה is paralleled by Aramaic יסך-סכותא.

Not only did Targum Onqelos match the wordplay, but he actually added a second: the Aramaic word נתכסי, from the root כסה, meaning “to cover, conceal,” translates the Hebrew כי נסתר, “when we are out of sight,” giving us the additional wordplay סכותא-נתכסי based on the two roots סכי and כסי.²⁷

I move on now to two words that seem, both in their Hebrew and Aramaic forms, to come together so naturally as to suggest that they are not to be counted as intentional alliteration but “accidental congruence of sound.”²⁸ On the other hand, the very fact of their frequent appearance makes them, according to Casanowicz, intentional: “There can be no doubt that the congruence of sound is intended in those combinations which recur often, and have thus the character of a formula.”²⁹

6. Exodus 2:10

MT

ויגדל הילד

When the child grew up

Targum Onqelos

ורבא רביא

The boy grew up.

Do we consider this to be intentional alliteration in the Aramaic, or is it accidental? The answer, in my opinion, depends on whether the Hebrew phrase could have been translated differently, thereby avoiding the alliter-

27. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has only the first wordplay, since he translates נתכסי by the Aramaic טמר, “to hide”: טמר ובינך ארום נטמר: בינא יסתכי יי אמר יסתכי די אמר יסתכי וסכותא אתקריאת די אמר יסתכי יי בינא ובינך ארום נטמר: גבר מן חבריה. Note that Casanowicz considers accumulation to be evidence of design, “that is, where ... two or more paronomasias occur in the same verse” (Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 27).

28. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 27.

29. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 27.

ation. Indeed it could, and it was. The expression ויגדל הילד is first found in Gen 21:8, speaking of Ishmael. Targum Onqelos uses ורבא רביא, as he did in Exod 2:10, but Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in Genesis writes, ורבא טליא. This makes the alliterative pair as cited by Targum Onqelos in Genesis and Exodus a matter of choice and hence intentional. However, in place of the alliteration in Targum Onqelos that is absent from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the latter supplies his own wordplay: at Gen 21:18 קומי שאי את טולי ית טליא, “come, lift up the boy,” he translates טולי ית טליא, using the Aramaic נטל (“to lift up”) and טליא (“child”).

7. Exodus 5:8

MT

ואת מתכנת הלבנים אשר הם עשים... תשימו עליהם לא תגרעו ממנו
But impose upon them the same quota of bricks.... do not reduce it.

Targum Onqelos

וית סכום לבניא דאנון עבדין מאתמלי ומדקמוהי תמנון עליהון לא תמנעון מניה
Apportion the same quota of bricks they made in the past. Do not reduce it.

The word מנה means “to appoint” and מנע “to prevent, deny, hold back.” The sense is: *demand of them* the same amount of bricks daily; do not *reduce* or *hold back* on the quota.

8. Exodus 8:7

MT

וסרו הצפרדעים ממך ומבתיך ומעבדיך ומעמך
The frogs shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people.

Targum Onqelos

ויעדון ערדעניא
The frogs will depart from you and your houses.

The root עדי means “to pass by, pass away.” It might be argued once again that this is not an intended pun but “the result of an unavoidable coincidence.” However, several other verbs with similar meaning could have been chosen to translate וסרו. For example, in Gen 19:2, סורו נא אל בית עבדכם (“turn aside to your servant’s house”) is translated זורו. In 2 Kgs

14:24, לא סר מכל חטאות ירבעם בן נבט (“he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat”) is translated by the Targum of the Prophets as לא סטא מכל חובי ירבעם בן נבט. The fact that סור has several different translations strengthens the argument that ויעדון ערדעניא is an intended pun.

The next example is taken from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus, which uses three different roots to give us an impressive wordplay.

9. Exodus 15:22

MT

ויסע משה את ישראל מים סוף ויצאו אל מדבר שור וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר
ולא מצאו מים

Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

ואטיל משה ית ישראל מן ימא דסוף ונפקו למדברא וטיילו תלתא יומין במדברא
בטילין מן פיקודייה ולא אשכחו מיא

Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds, and they went to the wilderness of Haluzah. They traveled three days in the wilderness, neglecting the commandments, and they found no water.³⁰

ואטיל is from the root נטל, meaning “to take or lead”; וטיילו from the root טיל, meaning “to stroll or walk”; and בטילין from the root בטל, meaning “to be void, abolished, suspended.” As I already noted above, “accumulation is also an evidence of design; that is, where ... two or more paronomasias occur in the same verse.”³¹

10. Exodus 16:13

MT

ויהי בערב ותעל השלו ותכס את המחנה

In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp.

30. Translation taken from Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, ArBib 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). Targum Onqelos offers a literal translation without the midrashic addition found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

31. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament*, 27.

Targum Onqelos

וסליקת שליו וחפת ית משריתא

And it was evening and the pheasants rose up.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

והוה ברמשא וסלקו פיסיונין

And in the evening pheasants came up.

סלק is the common Aramaic translation for עלה, “to rise up.” However, the Aramaic term for pheasant is פיסיונין, a loanword from Greek. This is the word used by Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. It therefore seems that Targum Onqelos preferred the Hebrew שליו in order to create the Hebrew-Aramaic alliteration וסליקת שליו.

11. Exodus 21:19

MT

אם יקום והתהלך בחוץ על משענתו

If he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff

Targum Onqelos

אם יקום ויהליך בברא על ברייה

If he rises and walks outside in a healthy condition

This example contains an idiomatic expression in MT: to “walk outdoors upon his staff” means to recuperate, to be on the mend. As scholars have noted, the Targums tend to paraphrase in order to explain an expression, rather than offering its literal translation. In this case, both Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Neofiti paraphrase by adding the word בשוקא, “in the marketplace,” as the meaning of “outdoors.”³²

Targum Onqelos substitutes a rabbinic phrase על ברייה meaning “in good health,” to create alliteration with the Aramaic word for “outside.” The first word, ברא, means “open country, field, outside,”³³ while the

32. So David Rider, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the Torah* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem: n.p., 1984), based on BM Add. 27031 with Hebrew translation. However, Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, translates Targum Pseudo-Jonathan as “and walks in the street upon his staff,” without the word בשוקא.

33. Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990).

phrase *על ברייה* means “in good health, firmly,” from the root *ברי*, from whence the word *בריא*, “healthy.”³⁴

Wordplay is not limited to Targum Onqelos. I have cited two examples from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (6, 9) and now offer several examples from the Targum to Isaiah.

12. Isaiah 1:6

MT

מכף רגל ועד ראש

From foot to head³⁵

Targum Isaiah

משאר עמא ועד רישא

From the lowest [lit. “the remnant”] of the people even to the heads thereof³⁶

Targum paraphrases (“of the people”) in order to explain the expression “from foot to head” in context. But why use “remnant” for “the lowest”? Because the resultant wordplay, *רישא-שאר*, makes the *merismus* “from foot to head” even more appealing.

13. Isaiah 1:14

MT

חדשיכם ומועדיכם שגאה נפשי היו עלי לטרח נלאיתי נשא

Your new moons and fixed seasons fill Me with loathing; They are become a burden to me, I cannot endure them.

Targum Isaiah

ירחיכון ומועדיכון רחיק מימרי הוו קדמי לרחוק אסגיתי למשבק

Your new moons and your appointed feasts hath my Memra abhorred; they have become an abomination before me: I have multiplied forgiveness.

34. The expression appears in b. Sotah 7b; b. Git. 89b. See Rashi on Exod 21:19. In midrashic literature (Genesis Rabbah, *Leqah Tov*) /אוטה/ *אוטה* means “until they established the halakah/the matter/it/ properly, correctly.”

35. The NJPS renders the Hebrew by means of the English equivalent.

36. Translations of the Targum to Isaiah are taken from Stenning, *Targum of Isaiah*. His Aramaic text reads *רישא* (“heads”) in place of *רישא*, the singular form, which is the literal translation of MT *ראש* ועד.

Whereas the Hebrew has three separate words to express the Lord's disgust with Israel's worship, the Targum uses the verb רחיק and the noun ריחוק for two of the expressions; the repetition indicates a connection between the figures of speech. The sense of the verse in the Targum is: "I have distanced myself from your new moons and fixed seasons; they were before me something far removed."³⁷ Could the repetition be calling our attention to ריחוק and רחיק as plays both on the Hebrew עלִי לטורח as well as on Aramaic ירחיכון?

I conclude with an example from the Targum to the Song of Songs, considered a midrash rather than a translation.³⁸

14. Song of Songs 1:5

MT

שחורה אני ונאווה בנות ירושלם כאהלי קדר כיריעות שלמה

I am dark but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem—Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the pavilions of Solomon.

Targum Song of Songs:

כד עבדו עמא בית ישראל ית עגלא אתקדרו אפיהון כבני כוש דשרין במשכני קדר
When the nation of Israel worshipped the calf, their faces darkened like
the Cushites who dwell in the tents of Kedar.

The verse in the Song of Songs speaks of a dark or black but beautiful girl. The second stich parallels "dark" or "black" in the first half of the verse with "like the tents of Kedar," assumed to be made of dark material. Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael. He is taken to be the eponymous ancestor of the Kedarite tribes, an ancient Arabic confederation who were understood to be bedouin, hence tent-dwellers in dark tents.

Cush was the son of Ham, assumed to be black;³⁹ The Septuagint uniformly translates Cush as Αἰθιοπία. All in all, we have multiple images of black to describe the guilt of Israel after worshiping the golden calf. The verb קדר in both Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew means "to grow dark," hence the Hebrew-Aramaic name midrash אתקדרו-קדר.

37. For the third expression, Stenning translates למשבק as "I have multiplied forgiveness." The sense seems to be: "I have overdone forgiving."

38. Komlosch, *The Bible in the Light*, 77.

39. The rhetorical question "Can the Cushite change his skin?" in Jer 13:23 implies dark skin color.

Out of eleven wordplays that I cited from Targum Onqelos on Genesis and Exodus, eight do not appear in Neofiti, and five are absent from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Further, Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan share between them only a single wordplay out of the eleven (example 8). This seems to indicate that the creation of plays in the Aramaic Targums was an individual endeavor rather than a targumic tradition, hence the lack of agreement between Targums. Even with so few examples, I hope I have shown that wordplay is to be found in the Targums. I believe that a systematic study of Targum Onqelos and the other Targums—first individually and then on a comparative basis—will reveal many more cases. Judging by the number and type of plays that I have gathered, of which only several were included, it would seem that, even if the Targums were originally written to be read out loud for the masses who did not understand Biblical Hebrew, their authors wanted to achieve independent aesthetic literary expression as well. Indeed, felicity is the instinctive aim of every writer, and wordplay in all its forms was one way to accomplish this goal.

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Genres of Prophetic Rhetoric in Rabbinic Exegesis

Robert A. Harris

I can't stand to see you sad
I can't bear to hear you cry
If you can't tell me what you need
All I can do is wonder why

Contemporary biblical scholars might not recognize these lyrics, penned by contemporary singer-songwriter Marshall Crenshaw, but I can think of no more appropriate way to begin this appreciation of Ed Greenstein than by citing them. And not only because Crenshaw is one of Ed's favorites. But as anyone who has heard him lecture knows, it is Ed's way, whether in the analysis of biblical texts or some other ancient Near Eastern composition, to teach through recourse to rock and roll and other popular music. With Ed, this is no mere gimmick, but rather it is due to his recognition of its inherent literacy and, even more significantly, the way its structure and compositional devices reflect literary and linguistic conventions that date from the very dawn of literacy during the Bronze Age. Let us take this quatrain as an example: Ed would point to its obvious structural devices (e.g., its ABCB rhyme scheme or the fact that each of the four lines contains four stresses). But more significantly, as a springboard to discuss the features, say, of the Ugaritic Kirta epic or the biblical oracles of Balaam, Ed would point to Crenshaw's reliance on parallelistic structure or his use of an slightly more conventional A word in line 1 ("stand") to adumbrate the more specifically focused B word ("bear") in line 2. Having analyzed the verse, Ed would undoubtedly continue by reflecting on the conservative, retentive nature of literary forms, from the earliest examples in the courts of ancient Mesopotamia through to the cubicles of the Brill Building in mid-twentieth-century North America. And we, Ed's students, would be

all the much wiser ... and also reflect afterward about how cool it was that our professor could do that!

As even a brief perusal of the bibliography of Ed's publications indicate, he has a ridiculously broad history of research. Just to indicate one brief example: his recent study and new translation of the book of Job, *Job: A New Translation* (Yale University Press). This is not a technical study aimed primarily at academicians, though the bibliography provided by the book contains references to some forty-five technical articles that Ed has written on the subject during the course of a lifetime of study and research. Ed has published voraciously on a wide variety of subjects, encompassing ancient Near Eastern study and Semitic languages; biblical composition, both narrative and poetic; biblical theology; medieval biblical exegesis; linguistics; translation theory; and so-called postmodern biblical studies, including reader response, feminist critique, and deconstruction. I am certain that I left something out! And I have not even included an impressive list of reviews, brief notes, and popular articles. Ed's list of publications would be the envy of any Bible professor—or any ten!

Yet somehow, amidst that publication record, Ed found the time to be a patient and exemplary teacher. This is true not only for his... dozens?! ... of doctoral students but, indeed, for every class he has ever taught. Students flocked to register for his courses both in North America and in Israel, knowing that Ed would supplement classroom pedagogy with private instruction as well. For many of us this continues down the years with electronic communications in addition to personal encounters. Moreover, Ed has written countless recommendations for his students and has anonymously written on behalf of grant proposals and fellowships.

What the world of biblical studies may not know about Ed, but would not be surprised to learn at this point, is that in the 1960s Ed was a rock and roller, playing saxophone in bands and writing pop music. In fact, a few of Ed's own musical compositions came close to being included on record albums—"came close," but in a rare lack of success for Ed, did not quite make it. Perhaps we should conclude that biblical studies benefited, but I know that it was the source of no little disappointment to the young Ed Greenstein. It was therefore my very great pleasure to be able to rerecord and publish two of Ed's songs in the early 2000s. One of the songs that Ed composed is entitled "You Can't Stop Now" and contains the following lyric: "You can't stop now, before you've started. / You can't stop now, there's so much time. / You can't stop now, before you've started. / Gotta make your evening mine." A simple yet effective lyric, written with all the

fervor of a young pop artist, it contains what might be both Ed's own personal philosophy as well as our hope and prayer for him: You can't stop now, Ed. With all of your current research projects still outstanding, we implore you to keep going! May it be God's will (it is certainly our wish!) that this volume of essays stand not as a mark for the pinnacle of your career but as a recognition of some midway point.

When one considers the work of thinker and poet Moshe ibn Ezra, of the eleventh–twelfth century, one is immediately struck by the sophistication of his presentation of poetics and how different it is from anything written by contemporary rabbinic biblical exegetes in northern France. Moshe Ibn Ezra's analysis of biblical prophecy begins with the assumption that there is an innate connection between it and his understanding of classical notions of rhetoric and poetics. In his great work of poetics, *Kitāb al-muḥāḍarah wa al-mudhākarah* (The Book of Discussion and Conversation), he writes:

The craft of prose is what is called *rhetorika* in Greek, which means prose. The philosopher Aristotle regards it as one of kinds of persuasive speech, which are inferior to strong reasoning [i.e., demonstrative proof]. It varies in quality, being better or worse in accordance with the capacity of the rhetoricians and the extent to which they present many ideas in few words, so as to express what is in the mind in clear speech, about the interpretation of which the listener cannot be in doubt.¹

Somewhat later ibn Ezra directs our attention to the role rhetoric plays in the Bible:

With us rhetorical prose is found in our sacred prophetic books, such as the farewell address² (of Moses that begins at), *you stand this day* (Deut 29:9) and continues until the end of the Torah; the farewell speech of Joshua, and *Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Schechem* (Josh 24:1);

1. A. S. Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra: Kitab Al-Muhadara Wal-Mudhakara: Liber Discussionis et Commemorationis (Poetica Hebraica)* [Arabic and Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1975), 12. I would like to express my appreciation to my colleague Raymond Scheindlin, who so immeasurably improved my translation of this passage (and the following two) from Moshe ibn Ezra's work on poetics that it seemed expedient to simply use his. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of texts are mine.

2. See Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra*, 21 n. 76.

the farewell speech of David, *the days of David to die drew near* (1 Kgs 2:1) ... and related to them are prayers, which are in the same category ... and things that resemble them and are similar to them.³

Most significantly for our purpose, ibn Ezra equates biblical and Greek poesy:

I say: The craft of poetry, which is called in Greek *poetica* ... is not like one of the sciences of independent existence, like arithmetic and geometry and music and the like, nor is it completely like the conventional sciences, grammar or [perfection?⁴] of language.... It is comprised of matters both accepted and learned, through which speech is accomplished [or “perfected”], and among the theoretical, metrics, as will be explained in its proper place in this treatise. The Arabic word *الشعر* [“poetry”] is a subset of knowledge ... and our language [Hebrew] is parallel to that, as in ... *he thinks to himself* (Prov 23:7: *שער בנפשו*). In the opinion of some (the term for poetry) is related to the term prophecy (*נבוא*), and from this comes the Hebrew word prophet (*נביא*).⁵

Thus according to Ibn Ezra one must approach the biblical prophets as master rhetoricians and poets in order to be able to unlock the meaning of prophetic speech: “For Moses ibn Ezra, the prophet was responsible for conveying the idea received from God in language that will be most rhetorically effective and poetically elegant.”⁶ Ibn Ezra was able to approach biblical literature in this way because of the degree to which he was steeped in Arabic learning in linguistics and poetics and, by extension, the degree to which this was itself rooted in ancient Greek and Latin traditions of rhetorical analysis and hermeneutics.

3. Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra*, 20.

4. This enigmatic word is *מקום* in the Judeo-Arabic text (Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra*, 22), presumably representing Arabic *muqawwim*. While it seems that the general idea expressed here is roughly equivalent to what some medievals called *צלחות הלשון*, “mellifluous language,” it is worthwhile to note that the terms placed together here effectively represent the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. I am grateful for fruitful discussions about this elusive term with Alan Cooper, Aharon Maman, and Ray Scheindlin.

5. Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra*, 22. See also Mordechai Cohen, “The Distinction of Creative Ability (*Fadl al-ibda'*): From Poetics to Legal Hermeneutics in Moses Ibn Ezra,” in *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabbanite Texts*, ed. Joachim J. M. S. Yeshaya and Elisabeth Hollender (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 89.

6. Cohen, “Distinction of Creative Ability,” 91.

Ibn Ezra alerts the reader that he himself has compared and contrasted biblical literature with Arabic and Latin on the subject of rhetoric and poetics.⁷ It is not clear to me that we know what Latin works Ibn Ezra consulted, but we are on better footing when we consider the question: What in the way of rhetorical knowledge would contemporary Christian scholars in the north of Europe have likely had at their disposal?

Much of medieval Christian poetics is based in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. Particularly in book 4 of this work, Augustine presents an approach to rhetoric that is compatible in his mind with Christian doctrine. This itself reflects many of the elements of the presentation in Donatus's *Ars maior*, which served as the major resource for poetics in the Christian scholarly world.⁸ For example, Augustine makes a distinction (*Doctr. chr.* 4.7.15) between the content of the prophetic message and the form in which it is cast:

I must say something about the eloquence of the prophets also, where many things are concealed under a metaphorical style, which the more completely they seem buried under figures of speech, give the greater pleasure when brought to light.

Observe that Augustine praises what is "beautiful," not necessarily drawing any conclusions here, at least with respect to the speech's effectiveness.

Another standard work on the subject for medieval Christian scholars was Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* (*Concerning Figures and Tropes*). Bede also roots much of his approach to biblical study in his appreciation of ancient Roman studies of rhetoric, particularly Cicero:

Quite frequently one finds in Holy Scripture word order that has been figured differently from ordinary speech for the sake of embellishment. The grammarians ... call this "schema"; we rightly call it a "dressing," "form," or "figure," because through it discourse is so to speak dressed up and ornamented.... But you should know ... that Holy Scripture surpasses all other writings not just in authority, since it is divine, or in usefulness, since it leads to eternal life, but also in age and in its very style. Therefore I decided to collect examples from it in order to show

7. אֶלְעָזָרִי וְעַלְלִינִי; Halkin, *Moshe Ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra*, 42.

8. Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105.

that the masters of worldly eloquence cannot lay claim to any of these figures or tropes without there being an earlier example in Scripture.⁹

Among the tropes and forms that Bede discusses at great length are prolepsis, anaphora, and paronomasia. It goes without saying that Bede, too, could not have applied rhetorical analysis to Scripture had he not already been steeped in whatever Latin learning was available to him.¹⁰

But if these types of evaluations are available to those investigating the role of ancient rhetoric in the medieval works of Andalusian Jewish scholars or northern European Christian scholars, what might be said with respect to northern French exegetes of the so-called school of Rashi? They neither had Arabic, on the one hand, nor Greek or Latin, on the other, and until the arrival of Abraham ibn Ezra, northern French Jewish scholars really had no access to the achievements of Judeo-Islamic scholarship. Nor did European Jewish scholars demonstrate much interest in or have direct access to the European rhetorical tradition until Profiat Duran and Messer Leon, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, long after the period of our interest. Nonetheless, the specific question I wish to pose is: To what extent do the peshat commentaries of the school of Rashi¹¹ interpret biblical prophetic speeches with any degree of understanding of their rhetorical features? A second question follows from the first: To the extent that they might, how can we account for any such attention?

9. Excerpted in Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 267.

10. See Jennifer M. Randall, “Early Medieval Rhetoric: Epideictic Underpinnings in Old English Homilies” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), 95–104.

11. In brief, I refer here to a twelfth-century development in reading the Bible according to linguistic and grammatical norms and in literary (and sometimes historical) context. With respect to Rashi himself, the most prominent innovator in this type of reading in eleventh-century northern France, it is more appropriate to employ the term “plain reading,” in opposition to earlier rabbinic midrashic modes. But by the twelfth century, one may properly speak of interpretation according to context. For definitions and discussion, see Sarah Kamin, *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 14; Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Book of Job* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 55; Mordechai Z. Cohen, “Reflections on the Conception of Peshuto Shel Miqra at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” in “To Settle the Plain Meaning of the Verse”: *Studies in Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Sara Japhet and Eran Viezel (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute; Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies of Hebrew University, 2011), 5–58.

The way in which I propose to engage these questions is not to claim at present any overt borrowing or direct influence from either Arabic or Latin source.¹² Although we know of a certainty that the elite among twelfth-century Christians schoolmen and rabbis discussed Hebrew Scriptures in both polemical and nonpolemical settings (and that the less learned among both Christians and Jews followed in their wake), we often lack precise understanding of the circumstances of their interaction.¹³ Rather, I choose to consider two approaches that might yield results. First, I will consider a number of ancient rabbinic interpretive texts that address the question of genre in prophetic speech, even if only in the most elementary of ways. Since the midrashic observations of the Sages form a common heritage for all northern French biblical expositors, it seems prudent to examine the degree to which they might have relied on such traditions to at least initiate their own explanations. Following this I will turn to contemporary studies that have pointed to a number of features in prophetic speech that are rhetorical in nature. Modern studies of prophetic rhetoric have, by means of close literary readings and form-critical analysis of the role of the prophet in Israel and the ancient Near East, investigated several major genres of prophetic speech. Having identified a number of these features, I will then use them as a type of control through which to examine northern French rabbinic commentaries on the Bible, and I will seek to determine if any of these commentaries—following their often brilliant and intuitive grasp of literary matters¹⁴—resonate in a particularly noticeable degree with rhetorical concerns.¹⁵

12. For a recent investigation that boldly asserts this very type of exchange, see Mordechai Z. Cohen, “A New Perspective of Rashi of Troyes in Light of Bruno the Carthusian: Exploring Jewish and Christian Bible Interpretation in Eleventh Century Northern France,” *Viator* 48 (2017): 39–86.

13. The literature dealing with overtly polemic interactions is rich and beyond the scope of this essay. For a window into less-charged Jewish-Christian interaction particularly with respect to biblical commentaries, see John Van Engen, “Ralph of Flaix: The Book of Leviticus Interpreted as Christian Community,” in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 150–70; and Robert A. Harris, “The Book of Leviticus Interpreted as Jewish Community,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6 (2011): 1–15.

14. See, e.g., Robert A. Harris, “Twelfth-Century Biblical Exegetes and the Invention of Literature,” in *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Early-Christian and Medieval Culture*, ed. Ienje van ‘t Spijker (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 311–29.

15. A caveat: while it is my purpose to analyze twelfth-century northern French rabbinic commentaries on the Bible that display rhetorical concerns in the forefront, I

The Traditions of the Sages

Some might raise objections to the very idea of searching for Jewish interaction with the dominant medieval Islamic and Christian cultures and intellectual worlds as a source for twelfth-century rabbinic understanding of prophetic rhetoric: Did not the ancient rabbis already, it might be reasoned, recognize the distinction between the concepts of rebuke and consolation in rabbinic literature?¹⁶ Since the point cannot be denied, we therefore need to make at least a general accounting of ancient midrashic texts that explore prophetic language and understand the difference between their observations and those of the medieval rabbis. What I will attempt to demonstrate is that the midrashic texts distinguish between prophetic rebuke and consolation in precisely the ways in which we would expect them to: in the main, these are homiletical messages, and the ancient rabbis made them with a sermonic point in mind. They did not do so with the intent of clarifying the rhetorical dimensions of prophetic speech. It is in these precise ways that certain medieval exegetes both innovate and excel.

As I readily admit, one can find in ancient talmudic and midrashic texts a rabbinic identification of different types of prophetic speech. For example, in the discussion of the order of biblical books found at b. B. Bat. 14b, we find the following observation:

hope to do this not with the aim of merely clarifying the extent to which these medievals may have “anticipated the fruit of modern scholarship” but rather will try to illuminate their efforts against the backdrop of growing contemporary European awareness of rhetoric and literary analysis during the twelfth-century Renaissance.

16. Ancient and medieval rabbinic liturgies might be seen as recognizing a categorical distinction between rebuke and consolation as well, in their division of the haftarot of rebuke and consolation before and after Tisha B'Av. When this distinction was first made is not our concern, though Elsie Stern claims that the earliest attestation of the descriptive liturgical term **שבע דנחמתא** dates from the Mahzor Vitry and Tosafistic literature, i.e., the twelfth century. See Elsie Stern, “Transforming Comfort: Hermeneutics and Theology in the Haftarot of Consolation,” *Prooftexts* 23 (2003): 150–81, esp. 151 and 176 n. 4; Simon Hurwitz, ed. *Mahzor Vitry* (Nuremberg: Bulka, 1923), 223–24. Both in Mahzor Vitry and in Tosafot on b. Meg. 31b (s.v. *Rosh Hodesh Av...*) the rabbis draw a distinction between **שלוש דפורענותא** and **שבע דנחמתא**, between three prophetic portions that announce the punishment of Israel for its misdeeds and are read during the three weeks prior to the commemoration of Tisha B'Av and seven portions of prophetic consolation to Israel that are read in the weeks following.

מכדי ישעיה קדים מירמיה ויחזקאל ליקדמיה לישעיה ברישא! כיון דמלכים סופיה חורבנא וירמיה כוליה חורבנא, ויחזקאל רישיה חורבנא וסיפיה נחמתא, וישעיה כוליה נחמתא, סמכינן חורבנא לחורבנא ונחמתא לנחמתא.

Since Isaiah preceded Jeremiah and Ezekiel, let [the book of] Isaiah precede the books of those other prophets! [True, but] since the book of Kings ends with the destruction [of the temple], and the book of Jeremiah deals entirely with [prophecies of the] destruction, and the book of Ezekiel begins with the destruction [of the temple] but ends with consolation [i.e., the rebuilding of the temple], and Isaiah deals entirely with consolation, as most of his prophecies refer to the redemption, we juxtapose destruction to destruction and consolation to consolation.

Thus according to the logic of this baraita, the order of the biblical books should be Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. However, this is not our concern; rather, we should note the consensus in this citation for the broad distinction in the perceived contents of biblical prophetic books, between “consolation” and “destruction.” Whether or not this observation is pertinent to a discussion of genres is another matter.

One more example from ancient midrash that will address the Jewish background to medieval rabbinic approaches to prophetic rhetoric is in Lam. Rab. 1:1, where we find the following rabbinic disagreement:

רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה, רבי יהודה אומר אין לשון איכה אלא לשון תוכחה, הדא מה דאת אמר: איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו ותורת ה' אתנו [אכן הנה לשקר עשה עט שקר ספרים]. ורבי נחמיה אומר אין לשון איכה אלא קינה, הדא מה דאת אמר: ויקרא ה' אלהים אל האדם ויאמר לו איכה, אוי לכה.

Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah [had a disagreement]. Rabbi Yehudah states: The language of Eikhah is nothing other than the language of rebuke. This is as Scripture has stated: *How can you say, “We are wise, and the instruction of the LORD is with us?” Indeed, behold, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie* (Jer 8:8). Whereas Rabbi Nehemiah states: The language of Eikhah is nothing other than the language of lamentation. This is as Scripture has stated: *The LORD God called to the human and said to him, Where are you?* (Gen 3:9), (punning) “woe to you”!

While it is true that the midrash points to “the language of Eikhah” (Lamentations) as rebuke, it is not as clear that the reference is truly to the book’s discourse but rather functions as a rabbinic wordplay on the word *איכה*, the first word of the biblical book of Lamentations and the midrashic connective tissue to the prooftexts from Jeremiah and Genesis.

Let us take up one final example, more extensive than the previous ones, that at least ostensibly addresses prophetic discourse. In Lev. Rab. 27:6 we read as follows.

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמן, בשלשה מקומות בא הקדוש ברוך הוא להתוכח עם ישראל, ושמוחו אמות העולם ואמרו: כלום אינן יכולים להתוכח עם בוראן, עכשיו הוא מכלן מן העולם!
בשעה שאמר להם: לכו נא ונכחה יאמר ה', כיון שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא ששמוחו אמות העולם הפכה להם לטובה, שנאמר: אם יהיו חטאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבינו, באותה שעה תמהו האמות ואמרו: זו תשובה וזו תוכחה?! לא אתא אלא לאת פוגגא עם בניי.
ובשעה שאמר להם: שמעו הרים את ריב ה', שמוחו אמות העולם ואמרו: היאך אלו יכולין להתוכח עם בוראן, עכשיו הוא מכלן מן העולם, כיון שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא שאמות העולם שמחין הפכה להן לטובה, שנאמר: עמי מה עשיתי לך; עמי זכר נא מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב, תמהו כלם ואמרו: זו תשובה וזו תוכחה זו אחר זו, לא אתא אלא מתפוגגא עם בניי.
ובשעה שאמר: וריב לה' עם יהודה ולפקד על יעקב, שמוחו ואמרו: היאך אלו יכולין להתוכח עם בוראן, עכשיו הוא מכלן מן העולם, מיד הפכה להם לטובה, הדא הוא דכתיב: בבטן עקב את אחיו.¹⁷

Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman stated: On three occasions did the Holy One come to dispute¹⁸ with Israel, and the nations of the world rejoiced and said: They will never be able to dispute with their Creator; now [God] will destroy them from the world!

[The first of these occasions was] when God said to them: *Come let us reason*¹⁹ together, said the LORD (Isa 1:18). Since the Holy One saw that the nations of the world rejoiced, he overturned [the rebuke] for good, as it says: *if your sins be like crimson, like snow shall they turn white* (Isa 1:18). At that very moment the nations were astonished, and they said: This is repentance, and this is rebuke?! [God] only came to play with his children!

[The second of these occasions was] when God said to them: *Hear, O mountains, the lawsuit of the LORD* (Mic 6:2). The nations of the world rejoiced and said: How will they be able to dispute with their Creator?

17. Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah* [Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 633–38.

18. The verb להתוכח, which I have translated “to dispute with Israel,” has the same root letters as the noun תוכחה, which means “rebuke.” Thus this midrash might be construed along the lines of “to rebuke Israel.”

19. However elusive the meaning of this particular word, its verbal root (יכח) is identical with the others that are typically translated as “rebuke.”

Now [God] will destroy them from the world! Since the Holy One saw that the nations of the world rejoiced, he overturned [the rebuke] for good, as it says: *My people, what have I done to you?* (Mic 6:3)... *Remember, please, how Balak the King of Moab sought counsel!* (Mic 6:5). All were astonished and said, This is repentance, and this is rebuke?! This after this?! [God] only came to play with his children!

[The third of these occasions was] when [God] said to them: *The LORD has a lawsuit against Judah and will punish Jacob* (Hos 12:3). [The nations of the world] rejoiced and said: How will they be able to dispute with their Creator? Now [God] will destroy them from the world! Immediately [God] overturned [the rebuke] for good; that is what is written: *In the womb he heel-grabbed his brother* (Hos 12:4).

This midrash is structured as a set of three individual units of discourse. In each of the three units, God is depicted by the darshan as coming לְהִתְבַּחֵךְ, literally “to dispute with” Israel, or Israel is described as responding to God with precisely the same word. In each of the three cases, the “nations of the world” rejoice because they—enemies of Israel as they are!—are certain that Israel will be unable to wiggle out of this predicament, as God has them dead to rights (and will certainly destroy Israel). However, in each case God, seeing that the nations rejoice, changes the indictment to a positive decree. At this juncture the nations, frustrated as it were with God’s change of heart, observe that Israel achieves this change of fortune without having performed any acts of repentance, as it is all God’s decision!

We might conclude that the midrashic composer noted the change in prophetic rhetoric from rebuke to consolation, and to a certain degree this would be correct. However, let us not overstate the case. The darshan, to be sure, notes the change in the content of the Divine decree. However, he does not describe the passage in terms of the rhetorical effect the speech would have on Israel but rather imputes the change in Israel’s fortune to God’s reaction to the glee of the nations at the prophetic denunciation of Israel and what they assumed to be Israel’s impending destruction. Thus the midrashic observation is homiletic in intent and does not really address the rhetorical shift in prophetic discourse per se.

Modern Scholarship

While it is not my purpose herein to analyze or survey the work of modern scholarship on the subject of prophetic rhetoric, I will limit myself to the briefest of references, if only to clarify my approach to medieval exege-

sis that expresses awareness of distinct prophetic speech types. Modern research into the genres of prophetic speech properly begins with the work of Hermann Gunkel.²⁰ As succinctly summarized by Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Gunkel ... was able to show that the prophets made use of many literary types, or *Gattungen*.”²¹ Following Gunkel, researchers published a wide array of studies that expanded and refined his observations. Possibly, the most significant of these were two studies by Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* and *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*.²² The former corresponds most particularly with what the rabbis term תוכחה, prophetic rebuke, whereas the latter focusses instead on what the rabbis regarded as נחמה, messages of consolation.

To these two, I will add the category of intercession, as described by Yochanan Muffs:

The prophet is the master of intercessory prayer, with which he attempts to rescind the divine decrees. The impulse to intercede stems from no source but his own soul. The content of his intercession flows from the stirrings of his own conscience and is often diametrically opposed to the opinion of the Lord that he transmits as prophet. It is in this intercessory role that the Bible clearly demonstrates the human grandeur, spiritual independence and intellectual creativity of its prophets.... Prophecy is a dialectical tension between passive transmission of divine anger and active intercession in the name of prophetic love.²³

20. Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998). A handy exposition of prophetic rhetoric may be found in Alexander Rofe, “Genres of Prophetic Speech,” in *Introduction to the Prophetic Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 56–73.

21. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 20.

22. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), in particular 169–98; Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

23. Yochanan Muffs, “His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition: A Study in Prophetic Intercession,” *Conservative Judaism* 33.3 (1980): 25–37, here 27. Muffs first described the phenomenon in two Hebrew articles he published in the 1970s; these were expanded as “Between Judgment and Mercy: The Prayers of the Prophets” [Hebrew], in *Torah Nidreshet: Three Interpretive Essays on the Bible*, ed. Avraham Shapira (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1984), 39–87; see 40 for a full description of the phenomenon and 39 n. 1 for Muffs’s earlier studies on the subject in Hebrew. The fullest discussion in English is

Therefore, we shall begin by addressing biblical texts that exemplify three primary types that are the essence of prophetic rhetoric (rebuke, consolation, and intercession) as described by modern scholarship, then examine a number of the subtypes employed by the prophets to enhance their message.

Northern French Rabbinic Exegesis of Prophetic Biblical Literature

I think it is not an outlandish claim to state that the general category of תוכחה, rebuke of one sort or another, is by far the most dominant single element of prophetic discourse.²⁴ Moreover, most modern scholars consider Deut 32:1–25 a classic example of the type. Let us therefore address Rashi's comment on Deut 32:12, which seems as much about Moses's speech as a whole as it is about that particular verse:

ואני אומר: דברי תוכחה הם להעיד השמים והארץ שתהא השירה לעד, על שסופן לבגוד ולא זכרו הראשונות שעשה להם ולא הנולדות שהוא היה עתיד לעשות להם, לפיכך צריך ליישב הדבר לכאן ולכאן. וכל העניין מוסב על: זכור ימות עולם בינו שנות דר ודר, כן עשה להם וכך עתיד לעשות, כל זה היה להם לזכור.
But I say²⁵ that [Moses's speech] are words of rebuke in calling heaven and earth to testify, that the song should be a witness (see Deut 31:21), since they [the Israelites] would in the end betray [God] and would not remember the former things that [God] had done for them, nor the future things that [God] would do for them, therefore one must settle the matter both with respect to here (i.e., the past) and here (i.e., the future). And this entire matter harkens back to: *Remember the days of old; understand the years of each generation and generation* (Deut 32:7)

To be sure, this one comment of Rashi ought not be construed as only or even mostly a rhetorical observation about all of Deut 32, but even with respect to verse 12 alone it seems that Rashi both intuitively feels the need to distance himself from midrash (e.g., Sifre Devarim 315) and Onkelos here, as each interprets the verse only as a positive prophetic prediction of God's

Yochanan Muffs, "Who Will Stand in the Breach: A Study of Prophetic Intercession," in *Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 9–48. See also Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 204–6.

24. See Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 90–92; Westermann's terminology is different, but there is some overlap between his conclusion and my estimate.

25. Leipzig 1 does not indicate that this statement should be attributed to Rabbi Shemaiah, so we may feel confident in attributing it to Rashi himself.

future beneficence toward Israel, as well as direct his readers' attention to the condemnatory nature of at least the first thematic half of Moses's speech. But Rashi's comment on verse 12 is not an outlier; elsewhere in his commentary on the chapter he does appear to note the overall genre of the first part of Moses's speech. At one point, Rashi even clearly distinguishes between the genres of rebuke and consolation, as is seen in his comment on Deut 32:35:

עד כאן העיד עליהם משה דברי תוכחה, להיות השירה להם לעד כשתבא עליהם הפורענות, ידעו שאני הודעתים מראש. מכאן ואילך העיד עליהם דברי נוחמים, שיבאו עליהם ככלות הפורענות.

Until this point, Moses adjured them with words of rebuke, so that this song should be witness against them, that is, that when the punishment would come upon them they would know (acknowledge) that I told them about this from the outset. From here onward he adjured them with words of comfort that would come upon them upon the conclusion of their punishment.

It makes little difference that Rashi considers Deut 32:1–35 a rebuke, whereas modern scholars may see the transition from rebuke to consolation already beginning in verse 26. He makes a point of terming two thematic halves of the speech as rebuke (דברי תוכחה) and consolation (דברי נוחמים). Indeed, Rashi may be the first exegete to have termed any aspect of Deut 32 a “rebuke.”²⁶

While Rashi by no means systemically interprets prophetic speech according to genre type, Deut 32 is not the only biblical text on which he makes such a distinction. Another clear example may be found in his commentary on Hos 2:1:

והיה מספר: מה ענין פורענות ונחמה סמוכין בדבור אחד? ורבותינו פירשו: הרגיש הושע בעצמו שחטא על שאמר החליפם. עמד ובקש עליהם רחמים, ובספרי דבי רב פרשת וישב ישראל בשטים שנינו רבי אומר יש פרשיות סמוכות זו לזו ורחוקות זו מזו כרחוק מזרח ממערב: כי אתם לא עמי; והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים, מה ענין זה אצל זה? משל למלך שכעס על אשתו, שלח אחר הסופר לבוא ולכתוב לה גט. עד שלא בא הסופר, נתרצה המלך לאשתו. אמר המלך: אפשר

26. Rashi makes this point clear from the outset of his commentary on the chapter, although without using identifying the genre as “rebuke”; see his comment on v. 1, האזינו השמים, שאני מתרה בהם לישראל, “Give ear, O heaven, that I am warning Israel...”

יצא סופר זה מכאן חלוק, כלומר, לבו חלוק ותוהו לומר למה שלח אחרי? אמר לו בא וכתוב לה שאני כופל לה כתובתה. ולפי פשוטו כך היא סמיכתו: כי אתם לא עמי ואנכי לא אהיה לכם, אראה עצמי כאילו איני לכם ותגלו לבין האומות, ואף שם תרבו ותצמחו ושם תשובו אל לבבכם לשוב אלי, כמו שנאמר על ידי משה: והשבות אל לבבך בכל הגוים אשר הדיחך וגו' ושב יי' אליהם את שבותך וגו', אף כאן ונקבצו בני יהודה ובני ישראל יחדיו וגו'.

The number [of the people of Israel]: Why are matters of punishment and consolation juxtaposed in one [prophetic] speech? Our rabbis have explained (b. Pesah. 87b): Hosea felt that he himself had sinned, since he had said “exchange them [Israel] for another people.” He stood and sought compassion for them. And in Sifre d’be Rav, in the portion *And Israel dwelt at Shittim* (Sifre Bemidbar 131 on Num. 25:1) we have taught: Rebbe stated there are portions juxtaposed that are remote one from another as east is from west: *for you are not my people* (Hos 1:9); *and the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sands of the sea* (Hos 2:1), what matter is this doing next to this? This may be compared to a king who was angry with his wife²⁷ and called for a scribe to come and write a divorce writ for her. But by the time the scribe came, the king had reconciled with his wife. The king said: Is it possible that this scribe would go out from here empty, that is to say, empty [handed] and wondering, “Why did he send for me?” [The king] said to him: Come and write her [a document] that I am doubling [the amount owed to her in] her wedding document. And according to its plain meaning, this is [the reason for] its juxtaposition: *for you are not my people, and I shall not be [God] for you* (Hos 1:9), I will look upon myself as though I am not [God] for you, and you shall be exiled among the nations, but even there you shall increase and flourish, and there you shall turn to your hearts to return unto me, as it is said by Moses: *And you shall turn to your hearts among all the nations where [God] shall have banished you, and the LORD your God shall restore your captivity*²⁸ (Deut 30:1–3). So, too, here: *Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together* (Hos 2:2).

27. The midrashic trope of “the man who is angry at his wife and then is reconciled with her” one that is itself rooted in the biblical prophetic figure of the marriage between God and Israel, works its way into peshat commentaries as well. See, e.g., Rabbi Yosef Kara’s comment on Isa 2:16 (ולאחר זמן הוא משדלה) ... כאדם שכעס על אשת ... ולאחר זמן הוא משדלה), בדברים ומדבר על ליבה ומנחמה (like a man who is angry at his wife ... and after a while he entices her with words and speaks to her heart and comforts her”). The image, which causes modern readers an appropriate shudder, is deserving of its own study.

28. This is a much-discussed word; I have chosen the translation “captivity” because that most closely approximates Rashi’s own understanding (see his commentary on Deut 30:3).

It is important to note that Rashi himself explicitly attributes his understanding of the contrast between a message of rebuke/punishment and one of consolation in Hosea to rabbinic midrash. However, when one examines the two rabbinic sources in their own midrashic contexts and distinguishes between those and the treatment Rashi gives them, one may clearly see a movement toward rhetorical understanding on the part of the eleventh-century exegete. Moreover, Rashi sharpens this observation by giving his own plain sense interpretation and connecting Hosea's prophecy with that of Moses. Again, it is not my purpose to evaluate the legitimacy of Rashi's interpretation; it is only to observe the distinction he makes between two prophetic genres. One might claim, in fact, that he approaches this text with an a priori understanding of those two types of speech.²⁹

Rashbam observes a similar type of distinction between rebuke and blessing as had his grandfather in his comment on Deut 33:1:

וזאת הברכה: מוסב למעלה: וידבר משה באזני כל קהל ישראל את דברי השירה
הזאת עד תמם. האזינו השמים וגו'. וזאת הברכה: אחר התוכחה של האזינו, חזר
ובירכן לישראל בטרם יעלה אל ההר למות שם.

And this is the blessing harkens back to *Moses spoke in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song until their conclusion. Give ear, O heavens...* (Deut 31:30–32:1). **And this is the blessing:** after the rebuke of Ha'azinu, [Moses] reverted and blessed Israel before he ascended to the mountain to die there.

Again, it does not particularly matter that Rashbam apparently regards all of Deut 32 as rebuke; he makes the distinction in genre, and that is what is significant.

Among the northern French rabbinic exegetes it is actually Rabbi Yosef Kara who makes the most trenchant observations about prophetic rhetoric.³⁰ Rashi's younger colleague, Kara not only distinguishes between the two genres of תוכחה and נחמה but also offers a rationale on why the composers of biblical prophecy frequently choose to interweave them within a single passage of prophetic speech: דרך כל הנבואות מה שמחץ

29. For further examples, see Rashi's commentary on Isa 37:3; Mic 4:2; Job 33:19; and b. Shabb. 129b (s.v. תוכחה).

30. Rashbam's commentaries on prophetic literature have not survived, and despite the temptation to assume that they would have been as typically acute as his other biblical commentaries, there is really not much we can say about them with certainty.

נחמה מתוך תוכחה, מרפא, “it is the way of all prophecies that what [the prophet] strikes, he heals, a consolation in the midst of a rebuke.”³¹ Let us examine an excerpt from his commentary on Isa 1:17–18:

ודע לך: מדה זו נוהגת בכל הקרייה, שבכל מקום שאתה מוצא תוכחה במקרא, ובחתם התוכחה הפסקה שאנו קוראין בלעז פְּרִיגְמָא, והענין שלאחריו מדבר בנחמה, לא ישיאך לבד להפליג ולהרחיק הענין שאחר ההפסקה מענין שלמעלה לפי שמצאת שם הפסקה, כי הענין שלאחריו לא בא אלא לחבוש שבר שלמעלה ולרפאות מחץ המכה שלמעלה. ואפרש לך מקצתן ומקצתן יורו על רובן.

Let it be known to you! This attribute is followed throughout Scripture: In every place that you find rebuke in Scripture, and at the conclusion of the rebuke there is an interruption that we call in Old French *prygya*,³² and the context that follows it speaks of consolation, do not let your heart distract you and drive you far from the context that follows the interruption from the context of what had preceded it, (just) because you found an interruption there. For the context of what follows comes for no other reason than to bind up the wound of (the rebuke) that preceded it and to heal the bruise of the wound. I will explain this (with regard to)

31. From Kara's commentary on Isa 35:2. See also his commentary on Isa 2:1: חזר ונחמן בלשון נחמה ... חזר ונחמן בלשון קשה. “so too here, in such way as he chided them earlier with hard language, he returns and comforts them with comforting language.”

32. See my analysis of this obscure foreign word in Robert A. Harris, “Structure and Composition in Isaiah 1-12: A Twelfth-Century Northern French Rabbinic Perspective,” in *As Those Who Are Taught: The Interpretation of Isaiah From the LXX to the SBL*, ed. Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 184 n. 42. David Marcus now confirms the word's Masoretic origins, as Alan Cooper had suggested to me in 2003: “The term פְּרִיגְמָא refers to breaks in the middle of a verse that are known as *pisqa be'emša pasuq*, ‘a section in the middle of a verse.’ There are only a small number of these *pisqa be'emša pasuq* cases in the Bible, most of which occur in the book of Samuel, and only five are documented in Masoretic lists for the Torah” (pers. comm., 9 October 2018). A useful summary of possible etymologies may be found in David B. Weisberg, “Break in the Middle of a Verse’: Some Observations on a Massoretic feature,” in *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ben Zion Wacholder, John C. Reeves, and John Kampen (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 39 (my thanks to David Marcus for this reference). Thanks also to Dr. Teddy Fassberg, who suggests that if the Greek-influenced Masoretic etymology is not correct, “a possible Latin-derived form from *frango*, such as *fragmen*,” might be a more convenient of accounting for Kara's use of the term, given his northwestern European context (pers. comm., 26 September 2018).

a few examples, and these few (must suffice) to teach about the multitude of other cases.³³

We should take note from Kara's description of the phenomenon that, here at least, he as much as considers the interweaving of prophetic rebuke and consolation a rhetorical device not of the prophets but rather of the redactors of the biblical books.³⁴

In continuing our survey of the way in which the northern French exegetes interpret the different genres of prophetic rhetoric, let us turn to texts that feature the role of the prophet as intercessor. Amos 7 opens by presenting a vision in which God reveals to the prophet the first of several devastating punishments through which Israel will be punished for its infidelity. Amos intercedes successfully on two occasions before being rebuffed on the third. In his commentary on Amos 7:2, Yosef Kara notes the intercessory nature of Amos's discourse:

והיה אם כלה לאכול: כשראיתי אותו שבא לכלות ולאכול כל עשב הארץ, מיד עמדתי לבקש מאת הקדוש ברוך הוא לסלוח על אותו עון, ואומר: "י אלהים סלח נא מי יקום יעקב כי קטן הוא, אם איני מתפלל עליהם, מי בהם שיקום לעזור ולעמוד לפניך להפגיע שתבטל בשבילו הגזרה זו כי נתמעטו צדיקי הדור.

When it had finished devouring: When I saw that (the plague) would completely **consume all the vegetation of the earth**, immediately I arose to request from the Holy One, Blessed be God, to relent concerning this sin, **and I said: Lord God, relent, I pray, how can Jacob arise, since he is so small!** If I do not pray for them, **who** among them **will**

33. Kara cites several examples (Isa 3:16–18; 4:1–2; Ezek 17:2–5, 9, 22–23) and explains how the melding of genres in each is to be recognized and understood.

34. Kara returns to his theme, so to speak, in considering the role of consolation as a rhetorical device meant to assuage the pain of a prophetic rebuke that preceded it, in his comment on Isa 1:27: **זהו שפירשתי למעלה בענין: שכל מקום שאתה: כמו בכאן שאומר למעלה בענין: איכה היתה לזונה קריה נאמנה, לרפאות תוכחה שלמעלה, לאחר שסיים כל התוכחה מפסיק בענין וחוזר ומרפא מעין התוכחה שהוכיחו** "And this is that which I have explained above in a (similar) context, that every place in which you find a break after a rebuke, and the pericope after the break speaks of consolation, know that the consolation comes to heal the rebuke that preceded it, as in this case here, that relates in the earlier context, *How has she become a harlot, that had been a faithful city* (Isa 1:21), after it had concluded the entire rebuke, it had interrupted that context and returned to heal the essence of the rebuke with which he had rebuked it."

arise to help (them) and stand before you to entreat that you cancel the decree on their behalf, **since** there are so few righteous people in this generation.

When turning to interpret Amos 7:2, Rabbi Yosef Kara articulates the intercessory function of the Israelite prophet, employing a verb (מתפלל) that clearly denotes the direction of the prophetic speech as originating on the human side and directing its message toward the divine.³⁵

Thus far we have presented but a few examples of northern French treatment of the major genres of prophetic speech: rebuke, consolation, and intercession. A lengthier study would reap even greater rewards. In his collection of form-critical and literary studies of the Bible, *Sacred Enigmas*, Stephen A. Geller concluded that, with respect to the form and function of the various genres of prophetic rhetoric,

the prophets employ many literary genres beyond those technically proper to their mission, the covenant lawsuit, oracles against the nations, and so on. In addition, one finds a host of other forms that they use to strengthen and, one suspects, embellish their message: laments, hymns, narratives, wisdom riddles and proverbs, short essays, sermons, and even love songs. Above all, the prophets were also poets; at least they employ the rhythmical and parallelistic conventions of the ancient Canaanite-Israelite prosodic tradition, as well as its formulaic poetic diction and set of themes.³⁶

Geller's observations about "other forms" would easily afford such a broader point of departure. The northern French rabbinic exegetes abound

35. See also Kara on Jer 14:11, where the exegete demonstrates how God effectively denies the prophet the opportunity to even attempt an intercessory prayer: ועל שהתפלל עליהם על שני בצרות, בבקשה ממך אל תתפלל בעד העם הזה לטובה – כי יצומו איני שומע אל רינתם וכי יעלו עולה ומנחה איני רוצה כי בחרב וברעב ובדבר אני מכלה אותן, "and since you have already prayed for them with regard to two droughts, I beseech you, **do not pray on behalf of this people, for good—for when they fast, I will not hear their prayers and when they offer sacrifice, I do not desire them, rather by the sword and by famine and by pestilence will I destroy them**" (Jer 14:12). Note that there are a few orthographic differences from our MT in Kara's citation of Jer 14:12. See also Rashi on Exod 32:10, Rashbam on Gen 20:7, Hazzequni on Exod 32:11, and Yosef Kara on 1 Sam 15:11 and Jer 15:1, where the exegetes all articulate the power of prophetic intercessory prayer to change God's mind.

36. Stephen A. Geller, "The Riddle of Prophecy," in *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), 109.

in articulation of the rhetorical dimensions of prophetic speeches, particularly when those rabbis depart from their immediate need to clarify the meaning of a given biblical text and instead address the nature (or genre) of prophetic compositional rhetoric, and especially when they do so with an aim of clarifying its purpose within the broader prophetic message. For example, Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency frequently notes aspects of prophetic speech that are intended, precisely as Geller states, to “embellish their message”: דרך הנביאים כשרוצים להכניס דבריהם בלב העם ממשיכי את לבם לדבר: “it is the way of prophets, when they want to cause their words to enter into the heart of the people, to draw their hearts and speak their words in the way of poetry and figurative language.” This is the proverbial tip of the iceberg, and many other observations of a rhetorical or literary nature are present in Eliezer’s commentaries.³⁷

At the outset of this essay I posed two questions about the degree to which the northern French rabbinic commentaries interpret biblical prophetic speeches with any degree of understanding of their rhetorical features. I think that even a cursory survey such as I have provided here must answer that question in the affirmative: the peshat commentators pay a significant amount of attention to the rhetorical elements of prophetic speech. However, any answer we might give to the second question, namely, how we can account for such attention, is perforce more tentative. While the French commentators from Rashi on explicitly drew some understanding and terminology from traditional rabbinic sources, I do not see any conclusive evidence that would point to knowledge of those traditions as sufficient to account for the depth and quality of their attention. Moreover, while it is possible to point to the achievements of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic scholarship to account for the understanding of rhetoric and poetics by later exegetes (particularly after the arrival of Avraham ibn Ezra to northern France sometime in the mid-twelfth century), it is difficult if not impossible to make this claim for earlier exegetes such as Rashi and Yosef Kara. This would leave what in a sense is the most likely factor, that is, the influence of the utterly dominant Christian culture in which the rabbinic exegetes lived and thrived. While this is not the place to make the argument in full,³⁸ it would seem that, during the increase in north-

37. Eliezer of Beaugency on Isa 5:1; see Eliezer’s comments also on Isa 3:8; 21:9–10; 33:19; 40:1; 41:1; 57:15.

38. This is something I hope to do in a longer work about the emergence of northern French peshat, *The Reinvention of Reading during the 12th Century Renaissance*.

ern European literacy during the eleventh and twelfth centuries,³⁹ rabbinic scholars likewise turned their attention to literary and rhetorical matters in their biblical exegesis.

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39. See, e.g., Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the 11th and 12th Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

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“Servant of Solomon”:
Sensitivity to Language and Context in
Moses Gabbai’s Supercommentary on
Rashi’s *Commentary on the Torah*

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The extraordinary cross-disciplinary reach of Ed Greenstein’s scholarship—as reflected, for example, in his integration of traditional philology and modern hermeneutic theory—is well known. Far less familiar, one may safely assume, are his contributions in a role that almost certainly goes unmentioned on his curriculum vitae: expositor of the biblical exegesis of Rashi (Shlomo Yitzhaki; 1040–1105), the most important Jewish scriptural commentator of all time.

Greenstein first explored Rashi’s exegetical legacy in a chapter on “Medieval Bible Commentaries” that appeared in a volume pitched to initiates in Jewish learning. Showcasing deft pedagogic skills, the chapter underscores the centrality of Rashi’s exegesis by according it more coverage than all other commentators combined. Most notable are a dozen pages in which Greenstein stages for neophytes what it means to perceive scripture “through Rashi’s eyes.” Taking the opening chapter of 1 Samuel as an example, he supplies Rashi’s glosses in translation with which he intersperses clarifications that illumine obscurities and connect the dots. In this way Greenstein dexterously brings to light the interpretive habits and sensibilities of the classic Jewish commentator and neatly exposes his often-subtle exegetical methods and aims.¹

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In a later study, “Sensitivity to Language in Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah,” Greenstein proceeds once more in something of the manner of a “supercommentator” (as modern scholars call commentators on a commentary), the better to tackle a major conundrum of Rashi scholarship. On one hand, Rashi pioneered, at least for northern European (“Ashkenazic”) Jewry, a bold departure from classical patterns of rabbinic interpretation by developing a contextual, grammatical, literary, and, at times, historical approach that he subsumed under the rubric *peshuto shel miqra’*. On the other hand, all of Rashi’s commentaries bear a definitively rabbinic stamp, with midrashic interpretations playing an especially decisive role in Rashi’s exegetical magnum opus, his *Commentary on the Torah*. Faced with the fact that Rashi often resorts to rabbinic dicta that “settle” the scriptural word (as he was wont to say) in a manner that falls short of his stated plain sense aspirations or that apparently lack any linguistic or contextual basis in the text, Greenstein refuses to temporize. Indeed, he makes bold to declare (while restricting his claim to narrative midrashim) that “each and every use of *derash*” in the *Commentary* can be understood as “an effort to account for the specific language and rhetoric of the text.” Greenstein hardly denies that the midrashim cited by Rashi may convey spiritual, ethical, or other types of edification, but he does insist that all such citations respond to an identifiable “contextual or linguistic peculiarity,” especially after Rashi recasts rabbinic dicta, as he typically does, with his own verbal stamp. Greenstein then sets out to make his case by analyzing a sampling of midrashic interpretations found in the *Commentary*, focusing on ones whose trigger(s) are none too clear.²

Greenstein’s study of sensitivity to language in the *Commentary* has stood the test of time (to judge by ongoing citation of it), while the issues it addresses continue to bestir energetic debate.³ All this being so, there

1. Edward L. Greenstein, “Medieval Bible Commentaries,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 231; see 231–42 for Rashi on 1 Samuel. For a recent overview, see Eric Lawee, *Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah: Canonization and Resistance in the Reception of a Jewish Classic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15–32.

2. Edward L. Greenstein, “Sensitivity to Language in Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah,” *The Solomon Goldman Lectures* 6 (1993): 55–56.

3. For current interest and debate, see Mordechai Z. Cohen, “A New Perspective on Rashi of Troyes in Light of Bruno the Carthusian: Exploring Jewish and Christian Bible Interpretation in Eleventh-Century Northern France,” *Viator* 48 (2017): 39–86.

is reason to think that Greenstein's category of Rashi's responsiveness to contextual or linguistic peculiarity can serve as a valuable instrument of discovery for investigating any number of entries in the little-studied but vast supercommentary tradition that has come to surround the *Commentary*.⁴ The supercommentary discussed here belongs to Moses Gabbai, an Aragonese rabbi whose career was sent on a radically new trajectory when Spain's Jewries were engulfed by riots and forced conversions in 1391–1392. After fleeing to North Africa, Gabbai composed *'Eved shelomo* (Servant of Solomon), which may be the largest Rashi supercommentary to exit the Middle Ages.⁵

In the work's introduction, Gabbai describes Rashi as “master, eminence, father of Israel” and a “great luminary who enlightens the eyes of the blind with true precepts and just judgments.”⁶ Despite his genuine reverence for Rashi, Gabbai's interactions with Rashi's exegesis, especially in its midrashic dimensions, frequently reveal a more complex texture than his work's highly subservient-sounding title (it could be rendered “slave of Solomon”) suggests. Gabbai can disclose, at times almost imperceptibly, a critical bent or quietly display what Ineke Sluiter calls the “power dynamics between source and commentary.” Among these, Sluiter stresses the capacity of a commentator to define a source's meaning, retroactively determining what it “said.”⁷

and bibliography cited there. For recent references to Greenstein, see, e.g., Ivan G. Marcus, “Rashi's Choice: The Humash Commentary as Rewritten Midrash,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson, Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 30 n. 3, 31 n. 5, 33 n. 12.

4. Lawee, *Rashi's Commentary*, 79–116. For exegetical supercommentary as a genre, see Lawee, “A Genre Is Born: The Genesis, Dynamics, and Role of Hebrew Exegetical Supercommentaries,” *REJ* 176 (2017): 295–332.

5. The work, which survives in a lone manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Huntington Donat. 25, 1r–253v), has only recently appeared in print. See *'Eved shelomo* (ed. Moshe Filip; Petah Tikvah: Filip, 2006). For orientation in Gabbai's life and writings, see Yisrael M. Ta-Shma, “Gabbai, Moses Ben Shem-Tov,” *EncJud* 7:319. On the anti-Jewish riots, see Benjamin R. Gampel, *Anti-Jewish Riots in the Crown of Aragon and the Royal Response, 1391–1392* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

6. Filip, *'Eved shelomo*, 42. All translations of rabbinic works are mine.

7. Ineke Sluiter, “The Violent Scholiast: Power Issues in Ancient Commentaries,” in *Writing Science: Medical and Mathematical Authorship in Ancient Greece*, ed.

Gabbai expresses his methodological bent in various ways. Already in his introduction he sets forth an eightfold classification of midrash from which he draws far-reaching conclusions, distinguishing types of rabbinic dicta that one may “challenge” (*meshivin*) and ones that one may not.⁸ The tendency to classify expresses itself further in Gabbai’s novel manner of lemmatization. In presenting comments of Rashi for analysis, he invents prefatory formulas that encode a critical evaluation of each one that Gabbai expounds. A lemma introduced with “the master explained” (*peresh ha-rav*) signals an interpretation embodying the “plain sense” (*peshat*) or, at least, one grounded in a textual nuance (*diyyuq*).⁹ A lemma preceded by “the master wrote” (*katav ha-rav*) contains an interpretation comprising a “midrash or haggadah” or midrashic interpretation juxtaposed to a plain-sense one in a format modern scholars often refer to as one of Rashi’s “dual interpretations.”¹⁰ If Greenstein rightly noted that Rashi “does not appear to have been quite so method-conscious as his critics,”¹¹ the same is evidently less true of Gabbai, who builds into every citation a methodological benchmark of the sort that remains mostly inchoate in Rashi’s corpus.

With some of the basic contours of Gabbai’s work in hand, let us explore a few examples of his supercommentarial criticism as it relates to the issue of linguistic and contextual triggers in Rashi’s exegesis. Like Greenstein, we retain the focus on midrashic interpretations but expand the purview to include legal midrash. In addition, we illustrate a different dimension of Gabbai’s appreciation of Rashi’s “sensitivity to language” that

Markus Asper, *Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Cultures* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 191–92.

8. Filip, *‘Eved shelomo*, 44–45. For examples of the category *meshivin* applied to rabbinic dicta before and after Gabbai, see Jacob Elbaum, *Lehavin divrei ḥakhamim: Mivhar divrei mavo’ le-’aggadah ule-midrash mi-shel ḥakhmei yemei ha-benayim* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2000), 56 n. 22.

9. Filip’s edition (*‘Eved shelomo*, 42) departs from the manuscript (Huntington Donat. 25, 2r), which reads “*yera’eh lo*” (meaning: as it appears to Rashi) where Filip reads “*yera’eh li*” (meaning: as it appears to Gabbai). For a possible significance of this difference, see below, n. 34.

10. Filip, *‘Eved shelomo*, 42. For “dual interpretations,” see Avraham Grossman, *Rashi*, trans. Joel Linsider (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 91–93.

11. Greenstein, “Medieval Bible Commentaries,” 229; see also Greenstein, “Sensitivity to Language,” 67.

has to do with his perception of Rashi's achievements not as a reader of scripture but as a writer of exegetical prose.

Rashi's interpretation of the response given by Abraham (then Abram) to his wife's proposal to enlist Hagar as a way to overcome their childlessness exemplifies the sort of seemingly baseless midrash that could send supercommentators scurrying to find a textual intimation. Glossing "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen 16:2), Rashi suggested that Abraham hearkened to "the holy spirit within her" (*ruah ha-qodesh she-bah*).¹² The idea that Abraham's acceptance of Sarah's proposal was predicated on an understanding of its heavenly rather than human origins might have been important to Rashi in light of the problematic consequences that ensued, but Gabbai's concern is not with the midrash's message but its linguistic basis. True, the comment fit snugly with Rashi's depictions of Sarah both before and after as a recipient of divine communication, nay, prophet superior in rank to her husband.¹³ Still, as overlaid on the report that Abraham heeded her request, the notion that this plan was the stuff of inspiration could seem "mere fantasy."¹⁴

Gabbai's citation of Rashi begins with "the master explained." In this way, Gabbai announces (for those familiar with his prefatory formulas) his conviction that, however seemingly far-fetched, Rashi's midrashic reading in fact is firmly rooted in the divine word:

"To the voice of Sarai." The master explained: "to the holy spirit within her." He means to say that had it written "Abram hearkened to Sarai," I would infer that Abraham received the message from his wife Sarai. When, however, scripture states "to the voice [*qol*] of Sarai," it should be understood in reference to the holy spirit within her, similar to the "heavenly voice" [*bat qol*], which derives from the holy spirit.¹⁵

12. Menachem Cohen, ed., *Miqra'ot gedolot ha-keter: Sefer bereshit*, 2 vols. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993–1997), 1:146, following Gen. Rab. 45:2. I often use the translation in Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995) as one that may better indicate a nuance prompting a midrashic response.

13. Rashi on Gen 11:29, s.v. "*yiskah*"; and Gen 21:12, s.v. "*shema' be-qolah*" (Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 118, 188).

14. David S. Shapiro, review of *Peshat in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature*, by Israel Frankel, *Judaism* 6 (1957): 287, where this characterization of the midrash is given in order to show its ultimate wrongheadedness.

15. Filip, '*Eved shelomo*', 87.

Gabbai argues that the reference to Sarah's *qol* is the element that roots Rashi's midrash in biblical soil. It alludes to the heavenly communication that Abraham discerned as identified by Rashi, since it summons the *bat qol* that rabbinic literature cast as a substitute for the holy spirit (but that the rabbis also treat as inferior to the inspiration enjoyed by prophets of yore, a point blurred by Gabbai).¹⁶ Though other supercommentators identified a different linguistic spur for Rashi's midrash, the one suggested by Gabbai proved convincing to some among Rashi's later readers.¹⁷

Beyond pointing out linguistic nuances that underlie midrashim apparently distant from the plain sense, Gabbai engages in a more unexpected effort to justify even midrashim without any clear textual warrant. Rashi midrashically read Moses's directive to the scouts to determine whether Canaan is wooded—"are there in it trees or not?" (Num 13:20)—as an inquiry about the possible existence of an "upstanding person" (*'adam kasher*) in Canaan who might shield its inhabitants from a forthcoming Israelite assault "by virtue of his merit."¹⁸ This reading, which set the forthcoming battle for the future land of Israel on the plane of moral probity instead of military prowess, was the only one Rashi supplied, nor did Rashi note its rabbinic provenance. In other words, readers of the *Commentary* could be forgiven for thinking that Rashi held the seemingly spurious midrash to be an embodiment of the plain sense, or at least a midrash that "settled" scripture in accordance with its language. Yet one seeking to find a compelling connection between midrash and text would seem to have no easy time of it.

16. See L. Stephen Cook, *On the Question of the "Cessation of Prophecy" in Ancient Judaism*, TSAJ 145 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 160.

17. With accustomed concision, Gabbai's son-in-law, Aaron Aboulrabi, writes: "Since it would have sufficed to say 'to Sarai,' he [Rashi] explained ['*qol sarai*' to mean] 'from the holy spirit within her'" (*Perushim le-rashi* [Constantinople, (1525?)], 20r). The same approach is taken in the supercommentary of Judah Loew (Maharal) of Prague. See his *Humash gur 'aryeh ha-shalem*, ed. Joshua Hartman, 9 vols. (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1989), *Bereshit*, 1:265. For another approach to Rashi's prompt, see David Pardo, *Maskil le-david* (Jerusalem: Makhon "Even Yisrael," 1986), 46–47, who focusses on the prepositional *lamed* (as opposed to *bet*) in the idiom "*shemoa' le-*" (on which see Yehudah Shaviv, "Ben 'shemoa' be-qol' le-'shemoa' le-qol," *Beit Mikra* 23 [1978]: 472).

18. Menachem Cohen, ed., *Miqra'ot gedolot ha-keter: Sefer bemidbar* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2011), 78; and b. B. Bat. 15a.

In this case, unlike Rashi's midrash on Sarah's voice, Gabbai takes no such stand. Proof lies in his use of the formula "the master wrote" to introduce his lemma, but in this instance Gabbai goes beyond such prefatory hints, stating that the sages spoke in "the manner of *derash*." On the methodological plane, then, there seems little to add, yet Gabbai's gloss takes on an intricate hue when he nevertheless supplies a reason for midrashic deviation from the plain sense in this case and lauds the midrash's homiletical artistry. That Moses's instruction cannot be read precisely as stated (*'al peshuto*) goes without saying, since the presence of trees in Canaan cannot be in dispute. Hence the sages were entirely "in the right" (*ha-din imahem*) to impose on the Mosaic query a metaphorical sense. What is more, their interpretive equation of arboreal richness with the protective powers conferred by moral rectitude is wholly apposite, since "just as a tree shields by its shade weary wayfarers, so an upstanding person shields his generation [from retribution]." Having unfolded what Maimonides might have called its "poetical conceit," Gabbai concludes with an unqualified commendation of this "very fitting *derash*."¹⁹ Thus does he subtly reinforce Rashi's and the sages' status as sensitive readers of scripture while disabusing readers of any notion that these great preceptors confused the midrashic elaboration in question with an actual interpretation of the text.²⁰

The pattern just seen, justification of a midrash's integrity combined with denial of its genuine grounding in the text, appears in some of Gabbai's glosses on Rashi's legal expositions. Consider, for example, "you are to keep my charge by not doing (any of) the abominable practices that were done before you" (Lev 18:30), which meant, according to Rashi, "to caution the court regarding this."²¹ Gabbai begins his lemma with "the master wrote," a sign that he finds a less than fully solid bridge between text and commentary. However, the size of the gap is, he argues, also

19. Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 338. For midrashic "poetical conceit," see Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 3.43 (trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 2:573).

20. Gabbai leaves unremarked a congruence between scriptural wording and midrashic homily arising from the rabbinic propensity to read a collective noun (here: *'es*) as a singular, turning an ostensible query about a lone tree into one about a single upstanding Canaanite.

21. Menachem Cohen, ed., *Miqra'ot gedolot ha-keter: Sefer vayyiqra* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2013), 144 (the source in Sifra is given there).

less than might hastily be thought. The verse concludes a litany of proscribed sexual unions, notes Gabbai. Were its warning addressed to those charged with adherence to these proscriptions, it would be redundant.²² Rashi therefore adopts the midrashic view of an admonition directed to the court, though that judicial body goes unmentioned in the text. The tension between text and commentary is reduced, even as Gabbai also grants that the midrash cannot make the strongest claim to a textual basis.

In the case of another midrash halakah, by contrast, this one yielding a woman's exception from the commandment to procreate, Gabbai clearly finds Rashi's rabbinic interpretation disquieting. To be sure, he does not doubt the halakic final holding. He does, however, prefer to ground it in an extratextual rabbinic tradition rather than in an operation of interpretation involving a subsemantic linguistic element that seems too capricious to provide a solid platform upon which to rest a precept of Jewish law. Rashi recorded the exclusion in his reading of Gen 1:28: "God blessed them, God said to them, 'Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth and subdue it'":

The "vav" [in *khivshuah*] is missing [meaning it can be read *khovsheha*, a singular masculine imperative with a feminine object suffix referring to the woman] to teach you that the male should prevail over the female so that she should not be a gadabout. It further teaches you that the man, whose manner is to prevail, is the one commanded to procreate, and not the woman.²³

For the rabbinically attuned reader, there was nothing surprising because, like the midrashists of yore, Rashi held that "full" and "defective" spellings yielded interpretively meaningful results, and reconfigurations of words (along the lines of the midrashic form *'al tiqrei*) were common enough.²⁴

22. Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 303–4. Gabbai explains the content of the "caution" (that the court must ensure that transgressors be duly punished) as Rashi had not.

23. Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:30 For rabbinic discussion and medieval afterlife, see Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 140–44.

24. For the rabbis on full and deficient spellings, see Arnold Goldberg, "The Rabbinic View of Scripture," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, ed. Philip R. Davies and Richard T. White, JSOTSup 100 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 159. For Rashi, see Aharon Mondschein, "Hakhmei

Gabbai introduces his discussion with “the master wrote,” code for the lack of any textual grounding for Rashi’s opening comment. Still, discharging his duty, Gabbai explains how the defective orthography produces Rashi’s interpretation.²⁵ As regards the women’s exemption from the commandment regarding procreation, Gabbai uses a prefatory formula unmentioned in his discussion of lemmatic terminology, “the master said” (*‘amar ha-rav*). He begins by stating, however, that “it is difficult.” Even if *khivshuha* is read as a singular, the actual verbs commanding procreation, *peru u-revu*, are plural, seemingly obligating the man and woman alike. Another difficulty is that the object marker midrashically read as “subdue her” patently refers to the earth (coming as it does at the end of the phrase “fill the *earth* and subdue it”). Gabbai gamely endeavors to address these challenges. For instance, he argues that the plural imperative *peru u-revu* could refer to “men alone” in their plurality, in keeping with the halakic midrash. Still, he cannot see his way clear to justification of the midrash halakah as exegesis. He therefore traces the female exception from procreation to tradition: “thus did they [the sages] receive, and tradition prevails over scripture’s plain sense.” This claim echoes Abraham Ibn Ezra, who thought that the midrash proceeded by way of *‘asmakhta*, that is, the post facto appending of the halakic norm to a textual hook rather than its derivation therefrom. Gabbai presumably also borrowed his verbal formula “tradition prevails over scripture’s plain sense” from Ibn Ezra.²⁶

ha-masoret bade’u mi-libam ṭe’amim li-mele’im u-le-ḥaserim’: ‘Al ma’avaqo shel r[abbi] ‘Avraham ‘ibn ‘Ezra be-niṣṣul ha-ketiv ha-miqra’i ke-kheli parshani,” *Shenaton le-ḥeqer ha-miqra’ ve-ha-mizraḥ ha-qadum* 19 (2009): 282–86.

25. Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 55.

26. Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 55–56. For Ibn Ezra on the midrash, see “Shiṭah ‘aḥeret” in Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:28 (s.v. “*peru u-revu*”). His denial of the midrash’s interpretive nature may mark a tacit response to Rashi’s implication otherwise. For Ibn Ezra’s tendency to rebut Rashi in this way, see Aharon Mondschein, “‘Ve-‘en bi-sefarav pashaṭ raq ‘ehad mini ‘elef’: Le-derekh ha-hityaḥasut shel ra’ba’ le-ferush rashi la-torah,” *Iyyunei miqra’ u-farshanut* 5 (2000): 221–48. For Ibn Ezra on *‘asmakhta*, see Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 39 n. 21; Jay M. Harris, *How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press Press, 1995), 82–85. For “tradition prevails...” in Ibn Ezra, see his comment on Deut 10:3 (Menachem Cohen, ed., *Miqra’ot gedolot ha-keter: Sefer devarim* [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011], 63). Gabbai invokes the notion

Although generally true to his supercommentarial calling, Gabbai can shift to censure on rare occasion. A case in point is Gen 4:15, a verse studded with lexical and syntactic difficulties.²⁷ One crux was the relationship between the protasis, “whoever kills Cain,” and the apodosis, “vengeance shall be taken on him *shiv’atayim*.” Did Cain’s potential killer (or killers) in the first part of the verse continue to be the focus of the second part? Rashi answered in the negative, bisecting the verse on the view that it was among those passages that “abbreviated their words,” alluding to their meaning “without making them explicit to you.”²⁸ On this understanding, the verse contained an aposiopesis (sudden interruption) that imparted a threat: “Whoever kills Cain ...! This is a threat ... but it does not make plain his [the killer’s] punishment.”²⁹ Acting every bit the plain-sense interpreter, Rashi adduced parallel verses to bolster his reading. On this view, God told Cain’s potential killer not only not to expect a reward for killing Abel’s murderer but to know that he would be severely punished, though how God did not specify, making the threat all the more menacing.

Rashi next explained that the continuation of the divine declaration did not address Cain’s would-be killer but rather Cain himself. It informed Cain that he would pay in full for his crime of murdering Abel, but only after seven generations, as, following midrashic leads, Rashi understood the ill-defined *shiv’atayim* that occurs both in Gen 4:15 and in a phrase in Lamech’s song soon thereafter (Gen 4:24). As Rashi filled in this part of the divine declaration, God stated, “I do not wish to take revenge on

of “received tradition” to authorize midrashim in the sphere of biblical narrative as well, e.g., Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 64 (on Gen 4:1).

27. A conspectus is Mark William Scarlata, *Outside of Eden: Cain in the Ancient Versions of Genesis 4.1–16*, LHBOTS 573 (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 176–80. John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 106, comments: “Almost every word in the Hebrew version of Gen 4:15a could be taken in at least two ways and often has been.”

28. For Rashi on *miqra’ qashar*, see Hanokh Gamliel, *Rashi ke-farshan u-khe-valshan: Tefisot tahbiriyyot be-ferush rashi la-torah* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2010), 176–84, 180 for the example at hand.

29. On Gen 4:15 (Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:64). For the similar reading in Targum Onqelos, see Scarlata, *Outside of Eden*, 195. For aposiopesis, see Bernard Dupriez, *A Dictionary of Literary Devices: Gradus, A–Z*, trans. Albert W. Halsall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 57–58.

Cain now. [Rather,] at the end of seven generations I will take my revenge from him, when Lamech arises from among his offshoots to kill him.” On this view, the phrase *shiv'atayim yuqam* had as its subject a figure nowhere mentioned in the verse, Abel, referring to “Abel’s vengeance on Cain.”³⁰ In effect, the second half of the proclamation made it clear that Cain’s immediate fate of exile was not commensurate with his crime, while informing Cain that a full reckoning for his murder of Abel awaited. That part of the story Rashi filled out when interpreting the song of Lamech, reading some of its enigmatic statements as an allusion to the midrashically vouchsafed tradition that a blind Lamech killed Cain, thereby serving as an instrument of divine justice.³¹

Gabbai begins a long gloss on Rashi’s complex reconstruction with an expression of stupefaction. It is simply beyond him “what possessed the master to divide the verse’s interpretation into two,” relating the verse’s first part to Cain’s killer and its second part to Cain. Far more obvious was to see the divine declaration in its unified “plain sense” and to supply an interpretation “continuous in all parts, from one segment to the next,” addressed to Cain’s potential killer from beginning to end. This reading was demanded by the context, with God, rather than portending Cain’s eventual death, easing his fear of vigilante justice as expressed in the previous verse (“whoever comes upon me will kill me!”). Underlying this approach—known to Gabbai in its essentials from Nahmanides—was a far rosier assessment of Cain after his murder of Abel than any that Rashi would afford. As Gabbai aired the possibility (which Nahmanides treated as a certainty), Cain may have “engaged in full repentance.” So several statements of Cain that Gabbai cited seemed to suggest. This sharp turn in the direction of contrition and reform explained the seemingly light sentence passed on Cain and the dire warning issued to any who would

30. For the probable proper text of Rashi’s full comment here (as in Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek, MS B.H.1), see Carmiel Cohen, “Ḥamesh he’erot be-nosaḥ divrei rashi bi-teḥilat sefer bereshit,” *Megadim* 56 (2016): 122–23.

31. On Gen 4:23 (Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:66). For analysis of Rashi’s approach, see Nehama Leibowitz, *Limmud parshanei ha-torah u-derakhim lehora’atam: Sefer bereshit* (N.p.: World Zionist Organization, 1975), 10–12. See further Yedida Chaya Eisenstat, “Rashi’s Midrashic Anthology: The Torah Commentary Re-examined” (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2014), 126–30. For the tradition of Lamech’s killing of Cain, see James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 159–72.

kill him.³² By contrast, though some midrashim envisioned a remorseful Cain, Rashi stayed with a different midrashic tradition that had the first murderer confront God unrepentantly until the end.³³

Even this servant of Solomon's charitable reading of Rashi had its limits. He does resume his supercommentarial efforts, endeavoring to justify the interpretation he rejects. He remains, though, unable to fathom why Rashi felt constrained to explain "Whoever kills Cain" as one thing, referring to Cain's potential killer but "lacking [reference to] the punishment, and "he shall be avenged *shiv'atayim* as a different thing," relating to Cain.³⁴ The best he can do is to summon the tactful conclusion that Rashi's interpretation requires further "in-depth investigation." That proposal hardly conceals Gabbai's sense that Rashi has missed the mark on this occasion, both in terms of his linguistic and contextual analysis and, most probably, his failure to see a remorseful Cain.

As noted, Gabbai's appreciation of sensitivity to language in the *Commentary* extends to its author's role as a writer. He can treat verbal formulations in the work on the premise that Rashi wrote with the same exacting precision with which he read. In this he anticipates an approach to Rashi's exegetical prose that intensified in Sefardic supercommentaries through 1492 and beyond.³⁵

Gabbai's leaning in this direction comes to the fore in a remark that he makes regarding Rashi's distinctive reformulation of a midrash on Judah's opening plea before the Egyptian viceroy (Joseph), "do not let your anger flare up against your servant" (Gen 44:18). On the level of midrash, Rashi imbued the remark with combative content and an angry intonation: "just

32. Filip, *'Eved shelomo*, 65–66. Cf. Nahmanides on Gen 4:13 and 4:24 (Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:65, 67). For discussion, see Michelle J. Levine, *Nahmanides on Genesis: The Art of Biblical Portraiture*, BJS 350 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2009), 126–34; and Meir Raffeld, "Demuto shel qayin be-'enei rashi u-ramban (mashehu 'al darko shel rashi be-ferusho la-torah)," *Talelei 'orot* 9 (2000): 11–24.

33. Rashi on Gen 4:16 (Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 1:64).

34. Filip, *'Eved shelomo*, 65–66. For all that, Gabbai begins the lemma with his formula signaling a textually grounded interpretation ("the master explained"). Since he rejects Rashi's interpretation, what he presumably means to indicate is that *Rashi* held it to be grounded in the text, which is certainly how Rashi presents it. As noted (n. 9), Gabbai's discussion of the formula as it appears in the manuscript of his work (as opposed to printed version) allows for this understanding.

35. See Eric Lawee, "The Omnisignificant Imperative in Rashi Supercommentary in Late Medieval Spain," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 10 (2014): 169–92.

as Pharaoh issues decrees and does not fulfill them, makes promises and does not perform them, so also you." In Rashi's rabbinic source, Judah charged the Egyptian with one count of duplicity ("just as Pharaoh issues decrees..."), to which Rashi appended a second one ("makes promises and does not perform them").³⁶ Did the second accusation add something missing from the first? Gabbai argues in the negative, finding here a simple instance of semantic doubling, but the way he makes the point is revelatory.³⁷ His formulation reflects a hallmark of the peshat tradition, especially as unfolded in the Andalusian school, that found its classic formulation, the one given it by Gabbai, in the writings of the southern French exegete David Kimchi: "[Scripture] reprises the same idea in different words" (*kefel ha-'inyan be-milot shonot*). In contrast to rabbinic assumptions about scripture, it held that substantive meaning need not be imputed to every repetition in scripture and that such phenomena could instead be chalked up to a matter of style, desire for emphasis, and the like.³⁸ By applying this principle to the *Commentary*, Gabbai as much as says that Rashi should be read with the same meticulousness that Rashi felt compelled to muster when unpacking holy writ!

A source of consternation to supercommentators, Rashi's apparent invocations of mutually exclusive midrashim in different places in his *Commentary* could sometimes be resolved with due attentiveness to Rashi's language.³⁹ Gabbai was among those loath to concede that Rashi could allow such a lapse, thinking it unimaginable, for instance, that Rashi should affirm that Miriam's son, Hur, was killed by a mob, only to interpret later on the basis of the opposite premise.⁴⁰

36. Cohen, *Sefer bereshit*, 2:144. Cf. Gen. Rab. 93:6.

37. Filip, *'Eved shelomo*, 162 (on Gen 44:18).

38. The history of medieval Jewish awareness of phenomena typically gathered in modern scholarship under the rubric "biblical parallelism" is a subject of considerable debate. For a book-length study, see Robert A. Harris, *Discerning Parallelism: A Study in Northern French Medieval Jewish Biblical Exegesis*, BJS 341 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2004). For Kimchi, who is most closely associated with the terminological marker *kefel ha-'inyan*, see the literature cited in Naomi Grunhaus, *The Challenge of Received Tradition: Dilemmas of Interpretation in Radak's Biblical Commentaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 215 n. 68.

39. Yeshayahu Maori, "'Aggadot ḥaluqot' be-ferush rashi la-miqra," *Shenaton le-ḥeqer ha-miqra' ve-ha-mizraḥ ha-qadum* 19 (2009): 155–207.

40. Filip, *'Eved shelomo*, 275, on Num 35:30.

In one case, Gabbai finds that an apparent contradiction dissolves when the requisite heed is paid to Rashi's carefully crafted expositions. Explaining "And these are the regulations" (Exod 21:1), Rashi stated that "every place that it says [the word] 'these' [at the beginning of a verse], it annuls [a connection to] the preceding. [Where, as in Exod 21:1, it begins] 'and these,' it marks a continuation of the preceding." In this case, where the conjunction did appear, the meaning was that "just as the preceding [laws in the Decalogue] were [legislated] from Sinai, so these [laws beginning in Exod 21] originate from Sinai."⁴¹ This statement, while not problematic in and of itself, seemed to be at odds with a previous gloss of Rashi on a verse that relayed that God imparted "a law and judgment" (Exod 15:25) during the Israelite sojourn at Marah: "At Marah God gave to them a few sections of the Torah [*miqṣat parashiyot shel torah*] in order that they might engage with them: the Sabbath, the red heifer, and administration of justice."⁴² Parsing the comment, Gabbai finds that there is, despite appearances, no inconsistency, since no actual laws requiring observance were delivered at Marah. Gabbai triumphantly points to elements in Rashi's formulation that "prove my contention." In the earlier gloss, Rashi speaks of sections of Torah "to engage with," not ones to observe. In addition, Rashi's earlier gloss spoke of "sections of the Torah" rather than "commandments." So understood, the earlier midrashic interpretation in no way undermined the one suggesting all commandments were initially promulgated at Sinai.⁴³

Conclusions

Gabbai's stance to Rashi's midrashic hermeneutic proves more multidimensional than expected. While, as foregrounded in this study,

41. Mordecai Cohen, ed., *Miqra'ot gedolot ha-keter: Sefer shemot*, 2 vols. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007–2012), 2:2.

42. Cohen, *Sefer shemot*, 1:128. The comment could roil later readers for other reasons. See *Rashi ha-shalem, Shemot* 2, 76–79 n. 86. For discussion, see Steven Wilf, *The Law before the Law* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 154–55. For variant traditions about the laws relayed at Marah, see Menachem Kasher, *Torah shelemah*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem: n.p., 1949), 14:168–69 n. 267.

43. Filip, *Eved shelomo*, 233, on Exod 21:1. As so often, Gabbai builds on, but also sharpens and extends, insights of Nahmanides, who summoned the apparent contradiction and even briefly noted Rashi's linguistic formulation (*leshon rabbenu shelomo*) in order to resolve it. See Cohen, *Sefer shemot*, 1:129, on Exod 15:25.

it often focuses on aspects of linguistic or contextual sensitivity in the *Commentary*, it also includes such elements as Gabbai's effort to give reason-infused meaning to some of the more bizarre midrashim that Rashi cites.⁴⁴ Although our tiny sampling centered on matters of language, it nevertheless invites some provisional conclusions. At least formally, Gabbai distinguishes between two types of interpretations in the *Commentary*: those fully responsive to an aspect of scriptural language and those that lack the status of full-fledged exegesis of the biblical word. Regarding the former, Gabbai, like many of his predecessors, engaged in what would become an ever more obsessive activity for supercommentators: the search for textual triggers even (or especially) when a midrash cited by Rashi seemed far removed from the plain sense. Even in the case of the second class of midrashim, Gabbai could seek to identify justification for their use.

Stepping back from specifics, we have seen that Gabbai, while donning the modest garb of a supercommentarial "servant of Solomon," did not lose his ability to cast a critical eye on the fruits of Rashi's exegesis. Taken in their ensemble, his glosses disclose a range of subtle negotiations with the commentator whom he set out to serve, forming part of a long and ongoing story of the often-loving attention lavished on a work that, in the apt words of our honoree, became "the most fundamental interpretation of the Torah for Jews."⁴⁵

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44. See, e.g., Eric Lawee, "The Reception of Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah* in Spain: The Case of Adam's Mating with the Animals," *JQR* 97 (2007): 33–66 (58–59 for Gabbai); and Lawee, "Exegesis and Appropriation: Reading Rashi in Late Medieval Spain," *HTR* 110 (2017): 515–16 (for Gabbai).

45. Greenstein, "Sensitivity to Language," 51.

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The Reluctant Brick Maker: Babel and Abraham in Pseudo-Philo and Bereshit Rabbah

Diana Lipton

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood.
And looked down one as far as I could...

Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

The tower of Babel stands at a hermeneutical fork in the road where two ways of thinking about Abraham and Israel diverge. Was Abraham the founding father of a nation with a land of its own, or was he the founding prophet of a religion? Would his descendants be issued passports as evidence of *national* affiliation, or would they need copies of their parents' wedding contracts as proof of *religious* identity?¹ In the Hebrew Bible² itself, the abandoned tower merely casts a shadow over the spot in place and time where Abraham first entered what would become the promised land. It was for the history of interpretation to determine what this juxtaposition would signify for the roads taken and not taken.³

It is an honor, a privilege, and a pleasure to dedicate this paper to Ed Greenstein, inspiring teacher and caring friend of more than thirty-five years: an apple fell close to the tree.

1. One means by which Jews can demonstrate Jewishness is to furnish a copy of a *ketubah*, wedding contract, showing that their parents were married under Orthodox Jewish auspices and must therefore have been regarded as Jewish (perhaps by furnishing copies of *their* parents' *ketubah*!).

2. Hereafter Bible.

3. I am grateful to Marzena Zawadowska for inviting me to present the first version of this paper in a session on "The Emergence of Historical Sensibilities and

The silence is deafening. From the present-day liturgical division of Torah readings⁴—Babel is in the section called “Noah” (Gen 6–10) and the call of Abraham is in “*Lekh Lekha*” (Gen 11–16)—to the organization of modern critical commentaries—Gen 1–11 typically has a section or even an entire volume of its own—Babel and Abraham have been kept apart. Why have almost all interpreters overlooked the juxtaposition of the emergence of proto-nations in Gen 11 and Abraham’s arrival in Israel’s prenatal homeland in Gen 12?⁵ Further, what is the significance of their failure to make a connection that, once made, cries out for interpretation?⁶

The tower of Babel and Abraham could have functioned as a pair in two distinct typological schemes that I will label “national” and “religious.” I will start with the national scheme. Exegetically speaking, the tower of Babel could have played the role in Abraham’s departure from Ur Casdim that was served by the Egyptian storehouses Pithom and Ramses in the Exodus narrative. That is, the tower, like the storehouses, could have been a vehicle for the oppression and persecution that created the conditions necessary for a slave uprising.

The biblical narrative contains at least two hints that the Babel story anticipates the nationalist typology of the Exodus narrative. First, there was a Babylonian “Pharaoh” in the vicinity of the tower: Nimrod.⁷ Nimrod

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4. The Torah (Five Books) is divided for liturgical purposes into sections, one (or occasionally two) of which is traditionally read aloud in synagogue services on the Jewish Sabbath. These liturgical sections are named for their first significant word.

5. It is not surprising that one of the few recent discussions of Babel and Abraham appeared in a journal devoted to the Jewish political tradition: Daniel Gordis, “The Tower of Babel and the Birth of Nationhood,” *Azure* 40 (5770/2010): 19–36. Gordis, who has published extensively on Jewish religious perspectives of the modern-day State of Israel, sees the Babel-Abraham juxtaposition as an endorsement of Jewish nationalism, whereas I see it as cautionary. I suspect that this difference reflects our politics more than our respective powers of exegesis. In this essay, of course, I am concerned with the latter.

6. For a comprehensive guide to postbiblical Jewish interpreters and interpretation, see James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

7. For a sense of Nimrod’s deeply complex role in postbiblical Jewish texts, including those I address in this paper, see C. T. R. Hayward, “Inconsistencies and Contradictions in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: The Case of Eliezer and Nimrod,” *JSS* 37 (1992): 31–55, especially “The story of Nimrod” on 45–55.

had just appeared in Gen 10, the first man of might and a great hunter. The jewels in Nimrod's crown were cities, including Babylon in the land of Shinar (10:10), the location of the tower of Babel; his kingdom produced Asshur, who built his own great city.

⁸Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the LORD.... ¹⁰The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and ¹²Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. (Gen 10:8–12)⁸

Second, the tower created an opportunity for a labor-intensive building project, equivalent to the Egyptian storehouses in Exodus. Construction is a significant theme in the Babel narrative. Indeed, as the Bible tells it, the initiative began with building materials; the architectural vision of a tower and the builders' desire to make a name for themselves were mere afterthoughts:

³And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar....
⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (Gen 11:3–4)

This emphasis on bricks and mortar underscores a structural similarity between the Babel episode and the Exodus narrative.⁹ In Egypt, bricks were instrumental in Pharaoh's subjugation of the Israelites (emphasis added):

8. English translations of Hebrew Bible texts lightly adapted from NRSV.

9. An early awareness of this parallel is found in the Qur'an, which has Pharaoh ordering the building of Babel, with Haman (another enemy of Israel) thrown into the mix as Babel's Bezalel: Pharaoh said: "O honorable council! It is not known to me that you have a worthy god other than myself. Haman, burn for me bricks of clay and build me a tower, so that I may look upon the God of Moses. I think he is among the liars" (Sura 28:38); the translation is based on Uri Rubin's translation of the Arabic into Hebrew in *הקוראן* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2016), 311. I am grateful to Meira Polliack for helping me with this. More recently, Daniel Gordis discussed bricks in Babel and Egypt in "Tower of Babel," 29–30. It need hardly be said that this approach is not easily reconciled with the perspectives of such scholars as Speiser and Sarna, who explain the emphasis on bricks with reference to the ancient Near East. See Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York:

^{13b}The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service *in mortar and brick*. (Exod 1:13b–14)

⁶That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, ⁷“You shall no longer give the people *straw to make bricks*, as before; let them go and *gather straw* for themselves. ⁸But you shall require of them the same *quantity of bricks* as they have made previously.... ¹⁰So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you *straw*. ¹¹Go and get *straw* yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.’” ¹²So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to *gather stubble for straw*. ¹³The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when *you were given straw*.” ¹⁴And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why did you not finish the *required quantity of bricks* yesterday and today, as you did before?” ¹⁵Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this? ¹⁶*No straw* is given to your servants, yet they say to us, “*Make bricks!*” (Exod 5:6–8, 10–16)

At first glance the Bible’s insistence that the tower of Babel was a product of the spontaneous will of the people (Gen 11:3) seems to weaken the analogy with storecities built emphatically at Pharaoh’s command. But exploitative regimes are not only imposed from above; people clamor for them. The desire for a dynastic monarchy, for example, did not emerge from potential rulers but from future subjects undeterred by Samuel’s health warning concerning monarchy’s unwanted side effects (1 Sam 8:4–18). To be sure, imposing edifices are notoriously used by private individuals to display, enhance, and increase their wealth and power (Trump Tower), but they are also the building blocks with which nations and their institutions construct themselves (the White House).

The Tower of Babel and Abraham in Pseudo-Philo

Standing as it does immediately before God’s command to Abraham to enter the promised land, the tower of Babel could have been brought to

Schocken Books, 1970), 71–72; and E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 75–76.

bear on the thorny question of why God chose Abraham. Postbiblical interpreters could have shaped Abraham into a proto-Moses, saving his own family from building Babel by taking them to a land of their own, just as Moses saved the Israelites from Pharaoh's building projects. But although commentators saw history repeating itself in other ways with Abraham's sojourn in Egypt (Gen 12:10–22) and the subsequent sojourns of his descendants (the Joseph narrative followed by four hundred years of slavery), they chose to overlook the building motif.

The postbiblical Jewish interpretation that comes closest to a proto-nationalist reading of Babel is Pseudo-Philo's *Late Biblical Antiquities*.¹⁰ According to Pseudo-Philo, the people clamored for a tower, but a group of twelve men, including Abraham, rebelled. The populism quickly turned political, involving princes, officers and a prison located in the king's house.

A brief analysis of what, according to Pseudo-Philo, Abraham and his comrades refused to do and why they refused to do it helps clarify where Babel belongs on the national/religious spectrum. As Pseudo-Philo represents it, the tower of Babel went far beyond Pharaoh's building program, which aimed mainly to elevate the ruler while keeping down a section of the population through forced labor. Pseudo-Philo's Babel also involved idolatry. The requirement that each man should write his name on the bricks intensified the aura of idolatry that hovers over the tower even in the biblical narrative. Abraham's refusal to make bricks in Pseudo-Philo is equivalent to his rejection of idols and shift to monotheism in the well-known story of Abraham in his father's idol shop in Gen. Rab. 38.13. We will return to this midrashic tale, but here in the

10. Pseudo-Philo is the name given to the Jewish author of *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (*Late Biblical Antiquities*, abbreviated LAB), a work probably composed between 50 and 150 CE whose earliest surviving extant version is in Latin, though based perhaps on an original Hebrew version via Greek. LAB retells biblical history from the birth of Adam to the death of Saul, sometimes adding little to the Bible itself but often introducing new characters and significantly reshaping the biblical narrative. See Frederick J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Daniel J. Harrington, Charles Perrot, and Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon, Les antiquités bibliques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1976); Louis H. Feldman and M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: Ktav, 1971); Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber antiquitatum biblicarum, with Latin Text and English Translation*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

meantime is Pseudo-Philo account of what took place at Babel's building site:

And they said, each to his neighbor, "Let us take bricks (*lit.* stones), and let us, each one, write our names upon the bricks and burn them with fire, and that which is thoroughly burned shall be for mortar and brick." (*Perhaps*, "that which is not thoroughly burned shall be for mortar, and that which is, for brick.") And each man took his bricks, saving twelve men who would not take them, and these are their names: Abraham, Nachor, Loth.... And the princes said to them, "Why would you not, every man of you, set your bricks with the people of the land?" And they answered and said, "We will not set bricks with you, neither will we be joined with your desire. One Lord know we, and him do we worship. And even if you throw us into the fire with your bricks, we will not consent to you." (Pseudo-Philo 6.2–4)¹¹

Like the biblical Exodus narrative, Pseudo-Philo spotlights an insider-outsider figure juggling his kinship with the rebels, on the one hand, and his privileged position in the regime, on the other. This Moses figure is not Abraham, however, but Jectan, who, like Moses (Exod 2:11–15), tried to save a kinsman without sacrificing his elite status.

And the princes were angry and said, "As they have spoken, so do to them, and if they do not consent to set bricks with you, then burn them with fire together with your bricks." Then Jectan, the first prince of the captains, answered, "Not so, but give them a space of seven days. And if they repent of their evil counsels and set bricks along with us, they shall live; but if not, let them be burned according to your word." But he sought a way to save them from the hands of the people, for he belonged to their tribe, and he served God. (Pseudo-Philo 6.5–6)

No longer able to walk the tightrope of his conflicting identities, Jectan's mind "melted," and he threw Abraham into the furnace with the bricks. But God caused the furnace to explode, the tower caught light, and 83,500 people died in the fire. Only Abraham emerged unscathed.

And Phenech and Nemroth said to Jectan, "Where are the men you shut up?" He replied, "They broke out of prison and fled by night, but I sent

11. Lightly adapted from M. R. James's 1917 translation, available online at <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/bap/index.htm>.

one hundred men to look for them and commanded them that, if they find them, they should not only burn them with fire but give their bodies to the birds of the heaven and so destroy them.” Then said they, “This *fellow* which is found alone, let us burn him.” And they took Abram and brought him before their princes and said to him, “Where are those who were with you?” And he said, “In truth, at night I slept, and when I awoke, I did not find them.” And they took him and built a furnace and kindled it with fire and put bricks burned with fire into the furnace. Then Jectan the prince being confused (*lit.* melted) in his mind took Abram and put him with the bricks into the furnace of fire. But God stirred up a great earthquake, and the fire gushed forth out of the furnace and broke out into flames, and sparks of fire and consumed all those who stood round about in sight of the furnace, and all those who were burned on that day numbered 83,500. But Abram was not at all injured by the burning of the fire. (Pseudo-Philo 6.14–17)

Pseudo-Philo pushed Babel in a nationalist direction, but just as Abraham seemed poised to become a proto-Moses, the author stopped short. Although Nimrod (Nemroth) is mentioned, he has a minor role in the persecution; Jectan, not Nimrod, throws Abraham into the furnace. This minimizes the national component. At the same time, Pseudo-Philo shows little interest in massaging the furnace motif, a potent symbol of martyrdom, to fit a national scheme. This makes sense. Both *pro patria mori* and a preference for suicide over risking national security or the lives of fellow countrymen presuppose a battlefield or at least a cold war. Martyrdom of the fiery furnace kind belongs properly to the world of religious belief and practice.

This brings me to what could have been the tower of Babel’s second typological function. It could have marked the spatial and/or temporal border between a socioreligious setting in which people tried to save themselves using objects made with their own hands and one in which they were rescued by the God who made them. In other words, Babel could have functioned as a signpost signaling a *religious* shift from idolatry to monotheism.

The Tower of Babel and Abraham in Bereshit Rabbah

In at least two ways, the idea that Babel marked the shift from idol worship to the worship of one creator God who acts in history is embedded in the Bible itself. First, the people built a tower with their hands in the hope of *saving themselves* from dispersal (Gen 11:4). Second, the emphasis on the

bricks and the futile hope of the people who made them resonates strongly with the Bible's most vivid depictions of practical idolatry versus monotheism, the so-called anti-idol polemics in Isa 40–55—also set in Babylon.

¹Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary animals. ²They stoop, they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. ³Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. ⁵To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike? ⁶Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh out silver in the scales—they hire a goldsmith, who makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries out to it, it does not answer or save anyone from trouble. (Isa 46:1–7)

Pseudo-Philo nods in this direction with Abraham's refusal to participate in the brick-making project. Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah, on the other hand, separates Abraham from the tower building, along with its nationalist associations, and focuses exclusively on the religious issue of idolatry:

And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah (Gen 11:28). Rabbi Hiyya said: Terah was a maker of idols. One day Terah went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in place of him. A man came and wanted to buy an idol. Abraham asked him, "How old are you?" And the man responded, "Fifty or sixty years old." Abraham then said, "Pitiful is the man who is sixty and worships idols that are one day old." So the man became ashamed and left. Once a woman with an offering of fine flour. She said to Abraham "Here, take it and bring it before the idols." Abraham stood up, took a stick, broke all the idols, and put the stick in the hands of the biggest idol among them. When his father returned he asked, "Who did this to them?" Abraham answered "I cannot conceal it from you. A woman came with an offering of fine flour and asked me to bring it before them. So I brought it before them, and each said, 'I shall eat first.' Then the biggest one stood among them, and he took a stick in his hand and broke them all." So Terah said to him, "Why do you

mock me? Do these idols know how to speak and move?" And Abraham replied "Let your ears hear what your mouth speaks." (Gen. Rab. 38.13)¹²

Pace commentators throughout the ages, Abraham is not an iconoclast here.¹³ He does not destroy the idols for destruction's sake but rather stages a theatrical event in which it appears that one idol destroyed the others. This elicits from his father's own lips the admission that idols are impotent, leading to a theological disputation between Nimrod and Abraham that ends when Nimrod throws Abraham into the fiery furnace:

Then Terah seized Abraham and handed him over to Nimrod. "Let us worship the fire," Nimrod proposed. "Let us rather worship the water that extinguishes the fire," replied Abraham. Nimrod said to him: "Let us worship the water!" "Then should I also worship the cloud, which bears the water?" answered Abraham. Nimrod said, "Let us worship the clouds!" Abraham answered, "Then should I also worship the wind, which disperses clouds?" Nimrod said, "Worship the wind!" Abraham answered, "Shall I then worship man, who endures the wind?" Nimrod said, "You talk too much; I worship only fire. I am going to throw you into it; let the God whom you worship come and save you from it!" Haran was standing there divided. He said, "Either way [I shall be safe]: if Abraham wins, I shall say, 'I am with Abraham'; if Nimrod wins, I shall say, 'I am with Nimrod.'" When Abraham entered the fiery furnace and was saved, they said to Haran: "On whose side are you?" Haran told them, "I am with Abraham!" They took him and cast him into the fire, and so he was burned and his loins were scorched, and he came out and died before Terah, his father. Therefore it is written, "Haran died before Terah, his father." (Gen. Rab. 38.13)

Nimrod intended neither to punish Abraham nor to make an example of him but to show that Abraham's God would not rescue him. It is against

12. Bereshit Rabbah in English lightly adapted from *Midrash Rabbah Translated into English, with Notes, Glossary and Indices: Genesis*, trans. Harry Freedman (London: Soncino, 1939).

13. I make a detailed case for this reading in "Idol Moments: Reading the Bible in Abraham's Father's Idol Shop," in *Marbeh Hokmah: Essays in Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yonah et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 349–68. That essay responds to Nathaniel Helfgot, "Unlocking the Riddle of Abraham the Iconoclast: A Study of the Intertextuality of Peshat and Derash," *Tradition* 43.3: (2010): 9–16. However, I am not aware of any commentary on the idol shop midrash, traditional or academic, that is not based on the premise that Abraham was an iconoclast.

this background that, according to Bereshit Rabbah, Abraham entered the promised land, having ridiculed idolatry and demonstrated that his God rescues and saves. Regarding both method and message, the tone of the midrash is remarkably consistent with that of the anti-idol polemics in Isa 40–55.

The Tower of Babel seems at first glance to have disappeared completely from Bereshit Rabbah's version of the Abraham story, but closer inspection reveals tantalizing traces. An intriguing aside in the Nimrod-Abraham encounter may be a nod toward Babel. Pseudo-Philo's Jectan was the biblical Joktan, the brother of Peleg, in whose days "the earth was divided":

²¹To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. ²²The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. ²⁴Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. ²⁵To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. (Gen 10:21–25)

Verse 25 is traditionally read as an allusion to Babel, the time when the world was divided into nations. According to the rabbinic chronography *Seder Olam* (ch. 1),¹⁴ Abraham was forty-eight years old when this division occurred. According to Gen. Rab. 30.8, Abraham was forty-eight years old when he recognized the one true God.¹⁵

Bereshit Rabbah's account of the encounter between Abraham-Nimrod contains a word with significant exegetical freight. Abraham's brother Haran is described as *plig*, divided (internally), over the theological disputation between Abraham and Nimrod. In the end, Haran adopts an opportunist position: he will go with the winner. On this reading, the *palagah*, division, that occurred in Peleg's days when Abraham was forty-eight years old was not a political one between the nations but a religious

14. For an English translation, see Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1998). For a Hebrew edition and commentary, see Chaim Milikowsky, *Seder Olam: Critical Edition, Commentary, and Introduction* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2013).

15. I am grateful to my husband Chaim Milikowsky for pointing this out to me and for his penetrating comments on a draft of this paper.

one between idolatry and polytheism, on the one hand, and trust in the one true God, on the other.

According to Pseudo-Philo, Abraham's eleven comrades fled to the hills. This evokes a similar episode in Gen 14, which happens to feature the King of Shinar, the kingdom in which the tower of Babel was located:

⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim ⁹with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and the king[s] of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell there, and the rest fled to the hill country. ¹¹So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; ¹²they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. (Gen 14: 8–12)

This narrative includes an inconsistency that cried out for interpretation. Fleeing to the hills, the king(s)—singular in Hebrew, but the sense is plural—of Sodom and Gomorrah fell or threw themselves into a bitumen pit, while everyone else escaped to the hills. A few verses later, though, the king of Sodom was still very much alive:

After his [Abraham's] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). (Gen 14:17)

What happened? By way of an answer, Bereshit Rabbah brings an analogy between the bitumen pit and the fiery furnace:

Now the vale of Siddim was full of bitumen pits (hemor) (Gen 14:10): full of pits producing asphalt (hamor). And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there, and they that remained fled to the mountain. Rabbi Judah said: *And they fell there* refers to the troops, while *and they that remained fled to the mountain* refers to the kings. Rabbi Nehemiah said: *And they fell there* refers to the kings, while *and they that remained fled to the mountain* refers to the troops. Now on the view of Rabbi Judah there is no difficulty. But on the view of Rabbi Nehemiah, Rabbi Azariah and Rabbi Jonathan in Rabbi Isaac's name gave the following further explanation: When Abraham descended into the fiery furnace and was rescued, some of the nations believed [that it had happened], while others disbelieved. But when the king of Sodom descended into

the bitumen and was rescued, then all believed in Abraham retrospectively. (Gen. Rab. 42:7)

The king of Sodom, as imagined by Bereshit Rabbah, reiterates the analogy:

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him (Gen 14:17). Rabbi Abba ben Kahana said: He began putting on airs, saying to him: "Just as you descended into the fiery furnace and were saved, so I descended into the bitumen and was saved." (Gen. Rab. 43.5)

The king of Sodom went to meet Abraham, having emerged unscathed from a pit full of one of two materials used to build the tower of Babel. "You survived Babel's brick furnace," the king could have said, "and I survived its bitumen pit." Lest Abraham develop royal aspirations, the midrash continues by attributing to him an explicit denunciation of human kingship:

At the Valley of Shaveh—the same is the King's Valley. Rabbi Berekiah and Rabbi Helbo in the name of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman said: It was so called because there all peoples of the world were unanimous in asking Abraham, "Be a king over us." But he replied, "The world does not lack its king and its God." (Gen. Rab. 43.5)

In this light, it pays to return to Bereshit Rabbah's first midrash on *Lekh Lekha*, which likens Abraham to a man who travels from place to place and sees a burning fortress (*birah ahat doleket*). From this Abraham makes his extraordinary theological inference: just as the burning building must have an overseer, so must the world.

And the LORD said to Abram, "Take yourself from your land...." Rabbi Isaac opened (Ps 45:11), *Listen, daughter, and look, and incline your ear, and forget your mother and your father's house.* Rabbi Isaac said, This is like someone who travels from place to place and sees a certain fortress burning. He said, "Would you say that this fortress has no overseer?" Above him, the overseer of the fortress peeked out. He said to him, "I am he, the overseer of the fortress." Thus it was when our father Abraham said, "Would you say that this world has no overseer?" The Holy One blessed be he peeked out over him and said, "I am he, the Master of the World." So shall the King desire your beauty, for he is your Lord. So shall the King desire your beauty. To beautify you in the world. And to bow down to him. Hence, And the LORD spoke to Abram. (Gen. Rab. 39.1)

Looking forward, the fortress surely alludes to the temple, which the Chronicler calls a *birah* (1 Chr 29:1, 19) and was still smoldering in the collective rabbinic imagination when the midrash was written. But what would Abraham have seen in his own lifetime as he wandered from place to place?¹⁶ According to rabbinic chronology, he would have seen the tower of Babel, a third of which was, perhaps, in flames when he had his momentous revelation:

And they said one to another (Gen 11:3). Who said to whom? Said Rabbi Berekiah: Mizraim said to Cush: *Come, let us make bricks, and burn them (ve-nisrefah) thoroughly*: This is written *ve-nissorfah* (and we will be burnt); this people is destined to be burnt out of the world.

And they said: Come, let us build us a city, and a tower (Gen 11:4). Rabbi Judan said: The tower they built, but they did not build the city. An objection is raised: But it is written, *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower* (11:5)?

Read what follows, he replied: *And they left off to build the city* (11:8), the tower, however, not being mentioned. Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba said: A third of this tower that they built sank [into the earth], a third was burnt, while a third is still standing. And should you think that it [the remaining third] is small, Rabbi Huna said in Rabbi Idi's name: When one ascends to the top, he sees the palm trees below him like grasshoppers. (Gen. Rab. 38.8)

So why did mainstream rabbinic tradition, unlike Pseudo-Philo, keep Abraham far away from Babel's building site? Why did Abraham not comment explicitly on the partial destruction of the tower or even observe it from a safe distance? Perhaps because the Babel story's explanation of why each people has "a land of one's own" simultaneously taints nationalism—nations are a necessary evil—and resists Israel's exceptionalism: Israel is a nation like any other, and what follows is merely the story of how it achieved its nationhood. As Genesis tells it, Abraham kept nationalism at bay and thus prolonged for a time the land's period of innocence. The rabbis supported Abraham in this endeavor, and it has remained ever since as one ideal. Robert Frost came to a fork and, not being able to take both roads and remain one traveler, chose one. We

16. I have discussed this question in ch. 4 of my *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

have the luxury, but also the immense challenge, of remaining one reader and traveling both roads.

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Fish Swallows Man: The Tale of Jonah and Its Reception History in Folkloristic Perspective

Susan Niditch

Jonah, a work about the prophet famously swallowed by a big fish, is an unusual and intriguing biblical book. Rich in folkloric motifs and informed by a kind of intimate personal religion, Jonah explores vexing theological and cultural issues about Israelite identity, divine compassion, and obligations to foreigners. This study focuses on the motif of fish swallows man in the biblical book, the way in which subsequent works depict the scene, and places these materials in the context of comparative folklore both in terms of content and scholarly approach. The goal is an enriched appreciation for this serendipitous narrative tradition, pointing to aspects and nuances missed by more theological treatments, underscoring the humor, artistry, and meanings that inform representations of Jonah and the fish.

In contrast to each of the twelve Minor Prophets, the biblical collection to which Jonah has been assigned by ancient collators, Jonah reads as a story composed of a series of interlocking sets of motifs that make for key segments of plot. The present work is informed by the morphological approach of Russian formalist Vladimir Propp and by the simplified version of Propp's morphology developed by folklorist Alan Dundes for his analysis of native American tales.¹ As Dundes notes, the building blocks

Edward L. Greenstein has long-standing interests in the study of traditional-style literature and has sensitively approached biblical narrative with attention to a range of cross-disciplinary theoretical approaches. With these interests in mind, ones that he and I share, I offer an essay on Jonah in honor of my friend.

1. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960); Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Indian Tales*, FFC 195 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1965).

of narrative content can be explored on a generic level and an increasingly more specific level.² Generic narrative segments in Jonah repeatedly involve an action and a reaction or reactions to it, and often the reaction functions as a new action to which a character or characters respond, and so the story proceeds until its enigmatic conclusion.³ The actions and reactions in segment 3 as specified create a version of the tale about the fish swallowing a man.

1. Charge and Avoidance: An opening call to Jonah by God (action) is responded to by Jonah's fleeing to the sea (reaction). He takes passage on a ship bound for Joppa in order to escape rather than prophecy in accordance with the deity's wishes (1:1–3).
2. Group Punishment and Mollification: God responds with a storm (action), and the sailors are persuaded by their passenger Jonah to throw him, the miscreant prophet, overboard, lest they all die (reaction) (1:4–16).
3. Individual Punishment, Petition, and Forgiveness: Jonah is swallowed by a fish (action) and responds with a prayer (reaction). This reaction serves as a new action that motivates the deity to have the fish vomit Jonah up onto the shore (reaction) (2:1–11).
4. Charge and Fulfillment: A second time Jonah orders Jonah to Nineveh (action); he goes and warns the Ninevites of impending doom (reaction) (3:1–4).
5. Repentance and Forgiveness: The Ninevites respond with repentance, an action that is also a reaction, and the deity responds by forgiving them (3:5–10).

2. Dundes, *Morphology of North American Indian Tales*, 15–60.

3. For other structural maps of Jonah, see Uriel Simon, *Jonah*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999); James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 28; John D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); C. A. Keller, "Jonas, le portrait d'un prophète," *TZ* 21 (1965): 330–34; Walter B. Crouch, "To Question and End, to End a Question: Opening the Closure of the Book of Jonah," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 102–12; Steven L. McKenzie, "The Genre of Jonah," in *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis; Studies in Honour of Antony F. Campbell, SJ for His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Mark A. O'Brien and Howard N. Wallace (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 160.

6. Anger and Mollification: Jonah responds with anger (reaction/action) and asks to die, taking off and sitting in a hut he has built, waiting to see what will transpire (action). God creates a bush to shade the prophet from the sun (reaction/action), and Jonah responds with relief (reaction) (4:1–8).
7. Destruction, Anger, and Stasis: The deity causes a worm to kill the bush (action), Jonah becomes angry, again wishing to die (reaction), and the deity responds to Jonah, emphasizing the importance of saving life. Here the story ends; there is no subsequent action or reaction (4:9–11).

Some of these motifs are typical of plots within traditional literature: the emphasis on journeys; the confrontation with a life-threatening situation or character; the rescue by a helper who is also an antagonist. Versions of these components are found in a wide array of folk traditions and can contribute to various plots and media: the runaway servant; death takes a holiday; the sea monster; the journey to the land of the dead and return.

The specification of these motifs in Jonah reflects particular prophetic and Israelite orientations: the antagonist and rescuer is the deity YHWH; the journey is motivated by a divine call to the prophet, whether in avoidance of that charge or in compliance, and associated with the related message about obedience and disobedience, sin and forgiveness that frames the narrative as a whole; the power of the deity emerges in the storm, the sea, and the wider capacity to kill and revivify; when threatened by death, the hero engages in a lament; the deity performs a kind of parable involving the plant to make a point about choosing life over death. Like other biblical characters such as Elijah, Jonah actually seeks to die at some points and engages in intimate and emotional verbal exchanges with the deity.

Among the folk motifs of Jonah, the fish swallowing a man has the largest number of international parallels and holds the greatest fascination for appropriators of the tale. Fanciful stories about sea worlds and their inhabitants have always been sources of human speculation, whether the focus is the environment with its underwater castles, its lost kingdoms such as Atlantis, or its inhabitants, including mermaids, mermen, monstrous dragons, and other sea creatures. Tales about such worlds and beings no doubt reflect both an innate attraction to the life-teeming water and a fear of its enormous capacity to overpower even the sturdiest of ships and cleverest of captains. To shine an instructive

comparativist light specifically on the motif of the fish that swallows a man, good places to begin are Stith Thompson's catalogs of folktale patterns, the types, expanded by Hans-Jörg Uther's more recent three-volume work; Thompson's catalog of individual pieces of content, the motifs; Theodore Gaster's collection of parallels to biblical tales, based on James George Frazer's earlier work; and the material collected by Hans Schmidt.⁴

Hans Schmidt's work reflects an early twentieth-century effort to place Jonah in the context of an international fund of folklore. Astutely, Schmidt suggests that the fish in various Jonah-like tales be examined as enemies, as rescuers, and as embodying a kind of underworld. Among the dangerous sea creatures and personifications of the sea itself are an array of biblical characters such as Rahab (see Ps 89:9–10; Isa 51:9–11) and Leviathan (see Pss 74:13–14; 104:26; Isa 27:1; Job 3:8; 40:25–41:26), the Canaanite "Prince River," and the Mesopotamian Tiamat. In folktales collected by Thompson and his students, fish themselves, in fact, are usually treated as benevolent helpers, frequently playing a role in tales of rescue, granting the hero a wish (B375.1.1), rescuing a ship (B541.5), recovering a lost object from the sea (B548.2.5), defeating a monster (L315.8), and swallowing a man to rescue him (B541.1.1). Examples in the B540s are all variants on "animal rescuers." A set of tales is also listed under B470, "Helpful Fish," and finds its place among tales of other helpful animals in B400–B499. In these various tales, humans explore the relationship between human and other life forms on earth. As Gaster indicates, scholars frequently compare the experience of Jonah to that of several classical heroes, including Phalanthus, the hero of Brundisium and Tarentum, rescued by a dolphin, Eikadios,

4. Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale*, FFC 184 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1973); Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols., FFC 284 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 2004); Stith Thompson, *The Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958); Theodore H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1981); James George Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law* (London: Macmillan, 1918); Hans Schmidt, *Jona: Eine Untersuchung zur vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907). See also the discussion of Indian and other international parallels discussed by Otto Komlos, "Jonah Legends," in *Etudes orientales à la mémoire de Paul Hirschler*, ed. Otto Komlos (Budapest: Allamositott, 1950), 41–47.

Korianos, and Arion.⁵ More malevolent images are provided by the representation of Jason on an Etruscan mirror, depicting the hero, sword drawn, battling a huge snake that seeks to swallow him, and an Attic vase that depicts the hero emerging from the enormous gullet of a sea monster.⁶ The fish in Jonah is not described as particularly benevolent or malevolent, an important ambiguity to keep in mind.

The action features of the motif, swallowing and disgorging, leads to an additional set of comparative material in Thompson's indices. Motif F910 includes a long list of "extraordinary swallowings," such as F911, a "person (animal) swallowed without killing." Examples of the story pattern involving the extraordinary swallowing are found under ATU (Aarne-Thompson-Uther) 123, 333, 700. The stories to which one is led describe an animal swallowing a man, though "not fatally." ATU 1889G specifically points to a type of story "fish swallows man" and to related motifs, such as F911.6 ("all-swallowing monster"), F913 ("victims rescued from swallower's belly"), F914 ("person swallowed and disgorged"), and X1723.1 ("swallowed person discovered in animal's body still alive"). ATU 1889G significantly is cataloged in the indices under "tales about lying," and the related motif X1723.1 is considered a building block of a kind of humorous tale.

Folklorist I. A. Ben-Josef describes some of the specific tales to which the indices lead, implicitly pointing to the overlaps and classificatory subjectivities that underlie this useful but sometimes frustrating scholarly resource.⁷ Parallels in pieces of content and plot as seen in the above overview are often not perfect, but such variation and improvisation are at the heart of traditional works. The Historic Geographic School to which Thompson was such an important contributor sought to use the compilations of motifs and types to trace the geographic and historical origins and development of traditional narratives. Many folklorists and biblicists do not share this particular goal, suggesting that there are no "original versions," an orientation reflected in this essay. Nevertheless, the comparative work enabled by the indices is useful in thinking about message and meaning in Jonah, its tone and effect on audiences, and the ways in which

5. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom*, 654 and nn. 22–25. See also Uwe Steffen *Das Mysterium von Tod und Auferstehung: Formen und Wandlungen des Jona-Motivs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963).

6. Hans Schmidt, *Jona*, 24, figs. 4 and 5.

7. I. A. Ben Josef, "Jonah and the Fish as Folk Motif," *Semitics* 7 (1980): 102–17.

it is like other versions of stories about men swallowed by creatures of the sea, and unique.

A few of the Jonah-like stories to which the Thompson indices lead are instructive as well as entertaining, leading to questions about the relationship between content, context, and theme. Each of these tales includes a sea creature, the act of swallowing a human or humans, and their emergence from the belly of the creature unharmed. The release may be by disgorging, by the machinations of the human protagonist(s) from inside the creature, or by the intervention of others, who often carve the prisoner(s) out of the creature's belly or who find him/them there unexpectedly when cutting up the sea animal on dry ground. Two Canadian tales are especially apt.

In one tale reported by E. W. Baughman, a huge fish follows a ship in the midst of a storm.⁸ The crew associates the fish with their dire situation and seeks to appease him, first by throwing over crates of oranges, then by throwing in three sailors in an apparent act of sacrifice to the beast, and finally by tossing overboard an old woman strapped to a rocking chair! The fish eventually washes ashore, and within it they find the lady "sitting rocking selling oranges to the sailors for five cents apiece!"⁹ A French-Canadian tale that shares the essential morphology with variations in

8. E. W. Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series 20 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 579.

9. See a summary of this tale (X1723.1.2b) and variants in E. W. Baughman, "A Comparative Study of the Folktales of England and North America," 2 vols. (PhD diss. Indiana University, 1953), 1071–73. A briefer variant that originates from a Welch informant by way of a Canadian collector is found in Herbert Halpert, "Three Tales from Gwent," *Journal of American Folklore* 58 (1945): 51–52. A lengthy and amusing variant preserved to capture the accent and dialect of the Caribbean informant is found in Elsie Clews Parsons, "Spirituals and Other Folklore from the Bahamas," *Journal of American Folklore* 41(1928): 453–524, here 519. In this account the woman and others simply fall overboard and are retrieved by chance when a shark caught by the sailors is being prepared for dinner. The sacrifice nuance is particularly strong, however, in a West Virginian version reported by a traveling salesman in Ohio. The old woman in the rocking chair is described as a "noble soul" and begs the sailors to throw her overboard to appease a monster fish. This version and others are found in Thomas Lowell Thomas, *Tall Stories: The Rise and Fall of the Great American Whopper* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1931), 71–76. See also Richard Dorson, "Yorker Yarns of Yore," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 3 (1947): 5–27, here 20. In this account a dead sailor weighed down with a grindstone and carpenter's axe has been buried at sea, whereupon his son jumps in after him. Both seem to be lost. He is revived in the sea

specific content motifs is provided by folklorist C. Marius Barbeau. This account features Petit-Jean, a favorite hero of traditional lore who is both resourceful and often too daring for his own good, although he always manages to survive, like his British counterpart Jack the Giant Slayer. Known also as Ti-Jean, he slays giants and undertakes various bold adventures, a successful underdog with whom audiences can identify. In the Jonah-like tale he is given a sleep potion at sea by sailors who throw him overboard, whereupon he awakens in the belly of a whale. He manages to lead the whale to beach itself onshore where he regains his freedom.¹⁰

A third relevant tale presented by folklorist Martha Beckwith (1940:443) features the boy hero Punia, another resilient underdog who combats and outwits the king of the sharks. The shark king is incensed with Punia for stealing all the good lobsters for his mother and his village. He tricks the shark into swallowing him whole and lives in its belly for ten days, making himself fully at home, cooking provisions he has brought on a fire, and carving out the shark itself from within. Understandably, his enemy weakens, heads for shore, and once he is beached, the villagers come and dig the boy out.¹¹

Such tales share with Jonah the pattern: danger at sea; the throwing of the human or humans overboard; the presence of sea creature; survival of the human(s) within the creature; and eventual emergence. In this rich trove of folklore, the reason for the threat at sea may differ or be unstated, the nuance of appeasement of the creature may or may not be found, the activities of the human in the creature are various as are the ways the person escapes, but the swallowing, survival, and emergence are always found. Indeed, in a variant of the first example above, a deceased person actually comes back to life.¹²

This comparative material, located by means of the cataloging work of Stith Thompson, his students, and subsequent folklorists, underscores

creature that swallows them, in this case a shark, and sets at sharpening the axe on the grindstone turned by the boy, as they work to cut themselves out.

10. Marius C. Barbeau, "Contes Populaires Canadiens," *Journal of American Folklore* 29 (1916): 1–136, here 11. An American tale about a folk hero named Tom Stasil also involves being swallowed by a whale and turning the huge creature into a kind of vessel; this version has the hero think of Jonah in the midst of his predicament! See B. A. Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1944), 647.

11. Martha Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 443.

12. See note 9 above.

humanistic universals and culturally, author-specific interests in the book of Jonah, shared meanings and messages and those especially important in a particular biblical and ancient Jewish context. First, contemplation of the mysterious and not fully understood creatures of the sea, like the depths of the ocean itself, expresses human fear and awe of an unfathomable and vast universe. The numerous variants of tales about the sea creature that swallows a man also may serve as a kind of whistling in the dark. The majority of these tales are not terrifying but comic, filled with grannies who sell fruit in the confines of the fish, or men who light a fire with the animal's tallow, or workmen who continue to ply their trade. The ordinary world, in other words, continues in the confines of this peculiar and potentially frightening place, inside the fish or shark or whale. Life goes on. The tales also emphasize the theme that human beings do have some control, ways in which they can act to save themselves in the face of danger. The person is often thrown overboard to save other people, the sacrifice being regarded as a means of appeasing the source of threat. Many of the swallowed heroes also work within the creature to survive and free themselves. An optimism and faith in human invention informs these tales, for the end is never really the end. Qualities of surprise, chance, and humor infuse the tales. What does Jonah's version of this internationally evidenced story reveal about the Jonah author's orientation and message?

As elsewhere in Scripture, the sea creature is a powerful and antagonistic force of nature, but the big fish in Jonah 2 has been appointed by God, a tool of the divinity, who also controls the end of Jonah's ordeal, speaking to the fish so that he vomits out the prophet. Jonah's activity inside the fish is also revealing. He engages in prayer, addressing the master of the fish, acknowledging the deity's power, and petitioning for rescue in the typological form and language of the lament. The speaker requests and hopes for release (Jonah 2:2), describes his problem in terms of drowning (2:3–5; cf. Ps 88), anticipates rescue (Jonah 2:7–8), and vows to sacrifice to his rescuer (2:10). He is not pictured to ply a trade, like some of the other swallowed people in comparable tales. Yet his very prayer, ending formulaically in the mention of promises or vows, suggests hope for release and some of the same optimism that is evident in more typical tales. For the prophet, his trade is communication with God and mediation between God and humans, a mission he will resume once he is released. People have hopes of rescue and often take actions that might lead to that outcome. In this case, the action is sincere prayer. The consummate control of the deity and the belief in the efficacy of prayer

come, of course, as no surprise in biblical literature about a prophet. Yet the Jonah tale, so evocative of a range of international tales that do not feature principle roles for a deity, also shares some of their qualities of comedy and serendipity. Scenes relating to the fish swallowing a man helps to build the portrait of a thoroughly quirky biblical character, in part because of other tales like it. The appeal, charm, and narrative attractiveness of Jonah is reinforced by the odd situation in which the prophet finds himself. Scenes involving Jonah and the fish are further developed by postbiblical contributors to the tradition and offer the most popular and popularized aspect of the book.

Jonah's interaction with the fish as developed in the rabbinic work *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* evokes some of the folktale themes explored above, adding a cosmogonic thread that reshapes the biblical account in mystical directions and further reveals the midrashist's own understanding of the biblical tale, the problems it presents, and the vital concerns that are suggested by its content. More needs to be said about *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* as it relates to this portion of reception history.¹³

In terms of genre, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* is a narrative midrash that retells and enriches portions of essential biblical myth, including not only the creation but also the experiences of the patriarchs and matriarchs and the exodus. It draws upon various midrashic traditions and, in Strack's view, reflects the narrative creativity of a particular author whose core work has been further expanded by various additions. *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* probably dates to the eighth or ninth century, for it makes reference to Arab rule and alludes to Islamic foundation narratives, its heroes and heroines, and holy sites.¹⁴

The section concerning Jonah and the fish in *Pirke R. El.* 10 begins by quoting Jonah 2:1 in the typical style of exegetical midrash, whereby a verse of Scripture is quoted and then explained and expanded by rabbinic techniques, bringing to bear other relevant biblical verses: "And assign did YHWH a great fish to swallow Jonah." Rabbi Tarphon links this verse with

13. The translation and edition employed is Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (1916; repr., New York: Blom, 1971).

14. See H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress: 1992), 329. For a discussion of *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* and the appropriation of Jonah traditions in rabbinic literature, see Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 340–49.

the creation of Gen 1, an account rich in allusions to the sea and to divine commands concerning the cosmogonic process. Tarphon declares that the fish was prepared for Jonah from the time of the six days of creation, emphasizing not only the way in which God plans ahead but also the links between Jonah's experience and the cosmogonic traditions reflected in the Hebrew Bible and developed in rabbinic and Jewish lore. A reflection of this link between Jonah's being swallowed by the fish and world creation by means of divine commands is also emphasized in Gen. Rab. 5.5.¹⁵ God's separating the waters from the dry land in Gen 1:9 is explored with biblical texts understood as assignments by God to aspects or creatures of the natural world. Thus the fish is commanded to vomit out Jonah. The midrash in Pirke Rabbi Eliezer on Jonah 2:1 is followed by reflections on the physical environment in which Jonah finds himself in the fish.

Entering the mouth of the fish is compared to entering the great synagogue, possibly, in Friedlander's view, a reference to the Great Synagogue in Alexandria.¹⁶ Jonah stands within the apparently ample space in this architectonic comparison. The eyes of the fish are compared to "windows of glass giving light to Jonah."¹⁷ Thus the space is not a dark hole or a womblike enclosure but a well-lit building of sorts. Light imagery is further developed in an interpretation attributed to Rabbi Meir, who states that "one pearl was suspended inside the belly of the fish and it gave illumination to Jonah, like this sun which shines with its might at noon." In this way the Jonah of Pirke Rabbi Eliezer shares with the swallowed heroes in the international range of folklore discussed above an unexpected continuation of recognizable reality in the fish, if existing inside a sea creature can ever be considered to be realistic. Jonah's experience moves even further beyond the mundane, for the pearl is described as a kind of crystal ball that reveals cosmological truths: "It showed to Jonah all that was in the sea and in the depths as it is said, 'Light is sown for the righteous'" (Ps 97:11). As Adam in midrashic tradition is shown all future generations (Gen. Rab. 24.2) and the mantic seers of classical Judaism participate in tours of the hidden cosmos,¹⁸ Jonah

15. The edition employed is J. Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischen Apparat un Kommentar* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1912).

16. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 69 n. 8.

17. Jastrow, 78a.

18. Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

is given a tour of the watery underworld. The proof-text from Ps 97 that points to Jonah's illuminating experience asserts that Jonah is deserving of this tour because he is among the righteous. The composer of the midrash thus puts a positive spin on the hero's characterization, significantly altering the biblical tale and implying that the rabbis may have been concerned that a man such as the biblical Jonah is considered to be a prophet of the Lord whose story is preserved among the Minor Prophets.

The opening architectonic and cosmological content of this midrashic excursus on Jonah 2:1 is followed in *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* by a conversation between Jonah and the fish, initiated by his captor. The fish, who of course talks, says to Jonah, "Do you not know that coming is my day to be eaten in the mouth of Leviathan?" Thus the creature who swallowed Jonah is imagined to reveal to the prophet that he himself is about to be devoured, and this information continues the revelatory aspect of the midrash. The fish knows what is coming and reveals to Jonah that the fish himself and the still-living man within the fish will soon be consumed by a gigantic sea monster associated in the biblical and postbiblical mythological tradition with world creation and the end of time. In the narrative of the midrash, Jonah offers to intercede to save the fish and himself, saying, "Lead me next to it." In addressing Leviathan, Jonah self-identifies with the one who will put a rope in Leviathan's tongue, a mythic motif found in Job 40:25, and as one who will prepare Leviathan as food for the messianic banquet. It is, he tells the beast, for the very purpose of interacting with Leviathan that he had descended into the sea. The midrash thus truly transforms biblical Jonah's character from an atypical and unwilling messenger of God into a willing participant in divine machinations as they relate to cosmic events. In Job, the Lord himself is the one who can ensnare Leviathan; it is only he who can accomplish such a feat, further proof of divine power. It is no small matter that the human prophet is so associated with this accomplishment, a player in the myth whose biblical protagonist is the deity himself.¹⁹ Jonah shows Leviathan the seal of Abraham, commanding him to look at the "covenant," and like a protective icon the seal seems to chase the monster away, for

19. On the transformation of the character of Jonah into a heroic rather than antiheroic figure, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 344. Gregg sets this transformation in the context of an "apocalyptic urgency" that he sees at play in an eighteenth-century setting.

“Leviathan flees away from Jonah,” covering some distance, “a walking journey of two days.”

The final section of the narrative midrash is framed as a tour of the watery underworld led by the fish, a theme that reprises the more abbreviated revelations to Jonah by the light-bearing pearl suspended in the fish. Jonah requests this tour as compensation for having rescued the fish from Leviathan: “Behold, I have saved you from the mouth of Leviathan. Show me all that is in the sea and the depths.” The Jonah of *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* thus has an interest in mantic wisdom, in knowledge of the unknown. The midrashist creates this tour of the unknown realms by means of interpretations of details in the prayer of Jonah 2. The great rivers of the ocean connect to Jonah 2:6, the paths of the Reed Sea to 2:6, the place from which flow forth the sea’s breakers and billows to 2:4, the pillars of the earth to 2:7, the lowest Sheol to 2:2, Gehinnom to 2:7, and that which lies beneath the temple of God to 2:7. The temple locus is part of the essential cosmos, integral to an eternal creation.

In the final section of the tour, knowledge is imparted concerning Jerusalem’s resting on seven hills, its foundation of stone rooted in the depths, and here, in this sacred thoroughly mythologized locus, Jonah sees the hereditary priests, the sons of Korah “standing and praying over it.” They transcend mere history and place, fixtures of the holy place. The fish tells Jonah that he is standing beneath the temple of God: “Pray and you will be answered.” Jonah asks the fish to stay where he is because he wishes to pray. Does the fish provide a witness? Does the presence of this mythological creature assure that the vision experienced will not evaporate? His unmoving presence is somehow necessary for the success of Jonah’s petition. The fish stands there, and Jonah prays that the deity who kills and makes alive bring him back from death. His prayer is not answered, according to *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, until he reiterates his vow to offer up Leviathan before God on the day of Israel’s salvation. This promissory vow is linked to Jonah 2:10. At this point God “offers a hint” to the fish, and the fish vomits up Jonah onto dry land as the midrashist returns to the biblical text (Jonah 2:11).

In a narrative midrash influenced by cosmogonic and mystical interests, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* thus transforms the story of “fish swallows man” found in the biblical tale of Jonah, providing a creative variant within the contours of Jewish tradition. The basic outline of the story remains the same: a fish swallows the man, who is not digested or killed in its belly, and then he is vomited out. The tale in *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* shares the architectonic interest in the environment inside fish with an array of international

versions of this vignette. The midrashist describes, for example, the nature of the lighting and the presence of windows. As in many of these tales, life goes on within, but the experience of Jonah is that of a visionary. The framing of the version in *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* is exegetical, tying the tale to the text of Jonah with special interests in chapter 2. *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* transforms Jonah into a rescuer, a righteous person worthy of seeing divine light and of participation in the end-time events involving Leviathan that inaugurate the messianic era. Jonah, moreover, takes the role of a seer who is led on a tour of the cosmos by the fish whose rescuer he has become due to the prophet's power over the monster Leviathan. The tour concludes with a stop at the foundations of the holy temple, a sacred place that is rooted in the structure of the earth and the very creation itself. There Jonah's prayer ascends, and he is released from the fish. The medieval midrashist thus seems to rehabilitate the biblical Jonah, placing him among the visionary prophets, a holy person whose own rise from a watery underworld anticipates the end time and the resurrection itself. Early Christians had made this significant transition in interpreting the characterization and story of Jonah already in New Testament times, explaining the popularity of visual images of Jonah among Christians of late antiquity, who linked Jonah's experience to that of Jesus (Matt 12:38–42).²⁰

The artistic cultures of late antiquity provide a rich array of visual portrayals of Jonah's experience with the fish in various visual media, a corpus explored recently by Robert C. Gregg and which we can mention here only briefly.²¹ A recent archaeological discovery unearthed by a team led by Professor Jodi Magness of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill adds to our set of case studies. The Jonah panel is one of several in a floor mosaic uncovered in a Late Roman synagogue located at Huqoq, a village in the Lower Galilee.²² In the mosaic, the fish is swallowed by a bigger fish who in turn is swallowed by a bigger fish, revealing a legendary pattern in and of itself.²³

20. Compare Matt 16:4; Luke 11:29. For a discussion of these various uses of the Jonah tale and the motif of the sign of Jonah by early Christian writers and their significance for variations in worldview, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 371–72.

21. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 361–68, 395–407.

22. See Jodi Magness et al., “The Huqoq Excavation Project: 2014–2017 Interim Report,” *BASOR* 380 (2018): 61–131.

23. The fish swallowed by bigger fish who is swallowed by a bigger fish is a favorite international folk motif, reflected in the English proverb “Big fish swallows little fish”

The study of “fish swallows man” as represented in the biblical book of Jonah, in a fund of international folklore and in postbiblical Jewish and Christian appropriations of the scene from Jonah, confirms the popularity of a typological scene that captures people’s imagination in a variety of periods, cultures, and media. This comparative study also provides a case study in methodology, pointing to the continued relevance of the Thompson indices and the ongoing usefulness of Proppian-based morphological approaches, reminding readers that the Bible is a rich repository of folklore and that the field of folklore studies can deeply contribute to the work of biblicists. “Fish swallowing man” is part of a repertoire of international folklore and operates as well in particular cultural trajectories. Bible scholars tend to approach “fish swallows man” rather monolithically as exemplifying “Yahweh’s grandiose power,”²⁴ “God as sovereign,”²⁵ or “God’s omnipresent control of all things.”²⁶ A few biblical scholars point to the reception of Jonah in later material and to other parallels but do so in a list-like and nonanalytical way and sometimes suggest that the scene in Jonah was borrowed from or based upon a specific extant classical source.²⁷ Scholars also seek context but perhaps in too historicist a way. Wolff, for example, suggests that that scene offers a satirical allegory of the Babylonian exile in which the fish represents Babylon.²⁸ To be sure, in the book of Jonah the fish is a divine instrument as is Jonah, and nuances of divine punishment, divine control, and the deity’s capacity for forgiveness inform the telling. Ultimately, Jonah bends to God’s will, albeit grumpily and somewhat perfunctorily. The mention of parallel materials and appropriations is important, as is the effort to contextualize the work historically, but more interesting conclusions can be reached from the foregoing, folkloristically influenced comparative analysis.

and by legends of fishermen’s observations collected by *History Nebraska*, an online publication of the Nebraska state government at <https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/those-fish-stories>.

24. Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), 139.

25. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 480.

26. Robert Alter, *Strong as Death Is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 146.

27. Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967), 3–8; Limburg, *Jonah*, 61–63.

28. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 139.

Tales that include the motif of fish swallows man as well as specific appropriations of the version in Jonah testify to the multivocalic dimensions of the scene, its adaptability and permeability in the hands of creative tellers, whose versions reflect their individual interests, messages, and cultural orientations, even while the core content and implicit universal, humanistic concerns remain visible. The latter include fears of the unknown and of being swallowed up; hopes for survival and revival against all odds; the desire to maintain one's routine even in the most challenging of circumstances; the appeal of imagery that captures the serendipitous and the unlikely. The versions of this conventionalized scene in which the sea creature swallows a human reach across periods, genres, and media in a humanistic process of reception and reoralization.

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POSTMODERN READINGS OF THE BIBLE

Gender, Ethnicity, Identity: Duality in the Book of Esther

Orit Avnery

The book of Esther has perplexed commentators and scholars throughout the centuries, many seeking to understand its theological import and the reason behind its inclusion in the canon. Herein I suggest that it addresses the relationship between marginalized groups and mainstream society via a female figure in order to discuss the Jewish people's status as a minority group in exile—embodied in their perception as the Other and foreigners/strangers.

Numerous feminist literary scholars have discussed the place and nature of the Other in Scripture, contending that both in general and within the gender hierarchy the Other plays a central role in the politics and ideology of the existing order.¹ Approaching (the book of) Esther in terms of

למורי האהוב פרופ' אד גרינשטיין, שליווה אותי בתהליך הקריאה והפרשנות וצעד איתי במשעולי מגילת אסתר וצפונותיה ושבזכותו המסע הפך מופלא, קסום ומפתיע. מאמר זה הינו עיבוד והרחבה של פרק מתוך הדוקטורט שהגשתי בהנחייתו הטובה.

To my beloved teacher Professor Ed Greenstein, who accompanied me in the process of reading and interpretation and walked with me through the paths of the book of Esther and its secrets. Thanks to him the journey became wondrous, magical, and surprising. This essay is based on my doctoral dissertation, written under his invaluable supervision. A version of it appeared in my *Liminal Women: Belonging and Otherness in the Books of Ruth and Esther* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2015).

1. For the close associations between feminist criticism and minority research, see Elaine Showalter, "A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 213–33. For the field of "identity politics," see, e.g., Howard J. Wiarda, *Political Culture, Political Science, and Identity Politics* (London:

gender and making use of feminist theory can thus illuminate the biblical text from a fresh perspective.² Engaging in a Bakhtinian reading of Esther, I suggest that the text contains two independent and separate voices that, despite the tension between them, demand equal attention and respect.³

Bakhtin admired Dostoevsky's ability to create tension and even contradiction within a single voice:

Where others saw a single thought, [Dostoevsky] was able to find and feel out two thoughts, a bifurcation; where others saw a single quality, he discovered in it the presence of a second and contradictory qual-

Routledge, 2014), 147–64; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–99; Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d1>.

2. The literature on feminist readings of the biblical texts is now extensive. The prominent figures include Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Tal Ilan, Amy-Jill Levine, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Athalya Brenner, Sidnie Ann White (Sidnie White Crawford), Susan Niditch, and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes. For gendered interpretation of Scripture, see, e.g., Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, eds., *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

3. Developing his theory via a reading of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin refers to the latter's new creative approach as "polyphonic" or "dialogic." This plurality of *sui generis* voices and consciousnesses are the defining feature of Dostoevsky's oeuvre, constantly preserving their separate identities. Polyphonic texts deliberately eschew authoritative stances, granting equal rights to all the protagonists. In the absence of any autocratic center, disparate views are not harmonized or reduced to one another but remain autonomous voices. Rather than a weakness, this constitutes the strength of such works, the literary artifact integrating various perspectives, each of which possesses the same status. The essence of polyphony, Bakhtin argues, lies in its facilitation of individual wills and desires. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). Many biblical scholars have been influenced by Bakhtin's theory and applied it to the biblical text; see, e.g., Carol Newsom, "The Book of Job as Polyphonic Text," *JSOT* 97 (2002): 87–108; Louis Stulman, "Jeremiah as a Polyphonic Response to Suffering," *Inspired Speech* (2004): 302–18; Mark E. Biddle, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: A Literary Analysis of Jeremiah 7–20*, *Studies in Old Testament Interpretation* 2 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996); Edward L. Greenstein, "Reading Strategies and the Story of Ruth," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (London: Routledge, 1999), 211–13; Kenneth M. Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

ity. Everything that seemed simple became, in his world, complex and multi-structured. In every voice he could hear two contending voices, in every expression a crack, and the readiness to go over immediately to another contradictory expression; in every gesture he detected confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously; he perceived the profound ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity, of every phenomenon.⁴

Like Dostoevsky's double reading, I argue for the ambivalence and irreconcilability of the tension between the two voices in the book of Esther. Heeding both accords with Bakhtin's caution against interpreting "these contradictions and bifurcation dialectically. No synthesis is possible between them, and they can hardly be contained within a single voice or consciousness."⁵ This persistent ambiguity constitutes "an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel."⁶ Rather than containing localized duplications of descriptions or motifs, the book of Esther presents two potentially contradictory readings. On the one hand, it evinces the haplessness of exilic Jewish life, wherein women remain bound within patriarchal society and ethnic groups are oppressed by mainstream societies. On the other, it suggests that diasporic Jewish life is sustainable. It thus poses a riddle with two possible resolutions.⁷

I seek to show how these two voices arise by analyzing the text and the style in which it is written.⁸ Juxtaposed statements create inconsistencies

4. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 30.

5. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 261.

6. Bakhtin, *Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 30. Cf. Empson's classic definition of "general ambiguity" as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* [New York: New Directions, 1966], 23).

7. The book's complex duality, both in form and content, is so prominent that it can be argued to form an integral part of its structure; see Sidnie Ann White, "Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 163; Athalya Brenner, "Looking at Esther through the Looking Glass," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 71–80; Edward L. Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Joseph Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 225–43.

8. Gale A. Yee, "'Fraught with Background': Literary Ambiguity in II Samuel 11," *Int* 42 (1988): 240–41.

that encourage a dual reading while maintaining narrational continuity.⁹ The reader thus constantly shifts between two interwoven dimensions that, while engaged in dialogue with one another, are in constant tension. Encouraging both readings and a multidimensional understanding of the story, the text hereby confronts the reader with a hermeneutical dilemma. I suggest that together the alternative plots constitute the meaning of the composition, the readings interlacing to create a single complex reality. As a “polyphonic scroll-novel,” Esther can thus be read as presenting “a variety of conflicting ideological positions [that] are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice.”¹⁰ It can thus only be fully comprehended when both voices are heeded.¹¹

1. First Reading: Maintaining the Status Quo

Esther 1 describes a social hierarchy in which those on the lower rungs are vulnerable to real and present danger from those above them. These marginal groups, which include women, reflect the attitude Persian society exhibited toward those it regarded as inferior. As scholars have long noted, numerous affinities exist between Vashti’s clash with Ahasuerus, which centers on gender, and Haman and Mordecai’s, which revolves around ethnic otherness.¹² These include:

9. The ambiguity may or may not be intentional. Following both Bakhtin and Sigmund Freud, Ilana Pardes remarks with respect to the biblical text as a whole that “the demarcation between intentional and unintentional choices is never a clear one, all the more so when dealing with a text whose history is so obscure” (Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992], 145). Whether or not specific texts are intentionally ambiguous has little effect upon the reader’s uncertainty, the latter demanding to be recognized, reflected upon, and perhaps maintained in light of the text’s failure to answer definitively the questions with which the reader initially approaches it.

10. David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 86.

11. The book of Ruth, which also has a female protagonist and likewise addresses Otherness and foreignness, is similarly characterized by two voices; see Avnery, *Liminal Women*.

12. See Greenstein, “A Jewish Reading,” 238; Mieke Bal, “Lots of Writing,” *Semeia* 54 (1992): 77–99; Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 68.

- ◆ Vashti and Mordecai both refuse to carry out the king's command.
- ◆ The text omits the reason for refusal in both cases.
- ◆ The king's wrath is mirrored by Haman's anger.
- ◆ In both cases, personal issues are transformed into matters of national concern, the minority group as a whole being punished rather than the specific individual. Just as Vashti's behavior leads to an edict demanding that all wives "treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike" (1:20), Mordecai's results in Haman's desire to eradicate the entire Jewish community.¹³
- ◆ Both stories feature the root בִּזְיוֹן "disgrace" in the context of expanding the edict issued in the wake of an individual's actions to the entire community (1:17–18; 3:6). This contrast evinces how the rebelliousness of the Other forms the pretext for their mistreatment by their superiors.
- ◆ In both cases, letters are written and sent throughout the land in a variety of languages.
- ◆ The individual receives a separate punishment than that meted out to the collective. While Vashti is banished from her husband, the women of the land are commanded to show respect to their husbands. Haman likewise plans to kill Mordecai immediately irrespective of the plan to rid the kingdom of all Jews at a later date.

Hereby we see how the exiled Jewish people are depicted in similar terms to women in patriarchal society. Representing the Jews, Esther's gender struggle reflects the ethnic difficulties of the Jewish people, the dangers the latter face mirroring the threat posed to women in patriarchal society.¹⁴ As

13. This is emphasized by the repetition of the word "all" in the two scenes: "Thereupon Memucan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers: 'Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against *all* the officials and against *all* the peoples in *all* the provinces of King Ahasuerus'" (1:16), and "Haman plotted to do away with *all* the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout *all* the kingdom of Ahasuerus" (3:6). Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the NJPS.

14. "As a female Jewish orphan, Esther is a living metaphor for Jewish life in the Diaspora" (Timothy S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther*, SBLDS 165 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998], 62). See also White, "Esther: A Feminine Model," 167,

Klein notes, the exiled Jews' reliance on a foreign ruler is closely linked to the status assigned to women in a patriarchal world: "As exiles, the Jews are in a 'dependent' position, one associated with females, whereas autonomy and power are associated with males."¹⁵

As an orphaned, exiled woman, Esther is the quintessential embodiment of the Other.¹⁶ *Inter alia*, her inferior status is highlighted by the constant male scrutiny under which she labors, being kept under watch by the guardian of the women, Mordecai, and the king himself. This position also reflects her need for protection. Reinforcing her weakness and fragility, the text paints her as a helpless figure in a threatening world. This status is reinforced by the way in which she is treated—and herself acts—as an object. Thus, for example, she is "taken" by Mordecai (Esth 2:7) and into the king's palace (2:8), "liked" by the guardian of the women who outfits her (2:9), and ultimately "taken" by Ahasuerus (2:16). When Ahasuerus seeks a replacement for Vashti and Esther is chosen from among the group of beautiful girls, she hides her background as per Mordecai's instructions: "Esther did not reveal her people or kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it" (2:10, 20; cf. "for Esther obeyed Mordecai's bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage" [2:20]). Likewise, rather than taking anything from the harem when brought before the king, "she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women, advised" (2:15).¹⁷

173. Numerous scholars have examined the description of the exiled or conquered Jewish nation in the form of a feminine figure; see, among others, Amy-Jill Levine, "Diaspora as Metaphor: Bodies and Boundaries in the Book of Tobit," in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 105–17; Daniel Boyarin, "Tricksters, Martyrs, and Appeasers: 'Hidden Transcripts' and the Diaspora Arts of Resistance," *Theory and Criticism* 10 (1997): 148.

15. Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 95 and 116–117; Susan Zaeske, "Unveiling Esther as a Pragmatic Radical Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33 (2000): 198.

16. Bea Wyler, "Esther: The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 125; Levenson, *Esther*, 56; Laniak, *Shame and Honor*, 62; Laniak, "Esther's 'Volkcentrism' and the Reframing of Post-Exilic Judaism," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford and Leonard J. Greenspoon, JSOTSup 380 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 77–90 (79: "Diaspora ... is by definition a peripheral identity"); White, "Esther: A Feminine Model," 167, 173.

17. This is also an astute political move, of course, Hegai being intimately acquainted with the king's tastes.

Herein she acts in accordance with the will of the men around her, ignoring her own needs in order to comply with patriarchal norms. In this sense, she exemplifies the attributes Simone de Beauvoir attributes to the “second sex”:

She is taught that to please ... she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll, and freedom is denied her; thus a vicious circle is closed; for the less she exercises her freedom to understand, grasp and discover the world around her, the less she will find its resources, the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject.¹⁸

Beauty itself, of course, is an inherently patriarchal concept. As Naomi Wolf observes, the “beauty myth”

tells a story: the quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful.¹⁹

Esther sends a subtle message to the king: while infringing on your territory—a forbidden act—I do so as a law-abiding woman who knows her place and submits to her superiors. The male perspective is underscored by the language: “As soon as the king *saw* Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor *in his eyes*” (5:2, my translation).

Numerous scholars have addressed the issue of why Esther delays her request of the king. According to Berman, she had no other recourse.²⁰

18. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2009), 294–95. See also Jack M. Sasson, “Ruth,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 320–28, Sasson, “Esther,” in Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 227; Joshua A. Berman, “Hadassah Bat Abihail: The Evolution from Object to Subject in the Character of Esther,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 647–69; Timothy K. Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

19. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991), 12.

20. Berman, “Hadassah Bat Abihail,” 647–69.

As a passive and submissive woman, she lacked the wherewithal to stand before the king and reveal her identity, following this revelation with a dramatic request. All she could do was ask for a small favor the king could not reasonably refuse. This minor initiative nonetheless constituted a major step, Esther heretofore having always been led, invited, or taken as an object rather than a subject.

Esther acts slowly and hesitantly. At the first banquet, she tests her status as a subject. This is the dress rehearsal for the actual performance. Not revealing the true purpose behind her audience with the king, she nevertheless speaks to him and Haman, impressing them with her presence. Hereby she ingratiates herself with the authorities, gaining an opportunity to explore how she might present her request. Finding herself in their graces, she invites the two men to another banquet.

Possibly still building up confidence, she initially adopts an indirect tack (7:3–4). Although petitioning for her life and that of “my people,” she does not identify either herself or them as Jews. Nor does she adduce any arguments against the planned annihilation, not even protesting that the Jews are loyal Persian citizens. She rather links the nation with her own fate, asking that they be delivered by virtue of her personal connections: with the king, on the one hand, with and the Jewish community, on the other.

Hereby she portrays her brethren as the quintessential “Other.” The only reason for sparing them is that she, the king’s ideal Other, is one of them. They are as worthless as she: had Haman’s edict been enslavement rather than elimination, she would not have bothered the king with her request, their freedom being too insignificant.

This reading suggests that Esther’s comfort zone lies exclusively within the boundaries of her definition as the Other. Believing herself to fall under the king’s protection only to the extent that she plays the role he demands of her, she defines herself and her people in terms that will merit his mercy. Here she thus takes a step backward, unable to maintain the courage it took to approach Ahasuerus. The process of empowerment whereby she transformed herself into a subject does not therefore constitute a genuine internal change, the active stance she assumes primarily being due to Mordecai’s encouragement and his own inability to approach the king.²¹

21. For this type of dynamic, see Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2009), 10.

By the end of the second banquet, Esther's discomfiture with her resourcefulness becomes clear and transparent. When she brings Mordecai before Ahasuerus, the king slips off "his ring, which he had taken back from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai" (8:2). The rare moment when Esther's independent personality shines through, enabling her to navigate her own course, promptly disappears. Seizing the first opportunity to revert to type, she again places herself under the wings of a protective male. Once the king has granted her request, her passivity stands out prominently against Mordecai's dynamism: "and letters were written at Mordecai's dictation, to the Jews and to the satraps" (Esth 8:9). Stepping aside so that Mordecai can take the lead, she allows him to take the credit for saving the community, thereby putting fear into their enemies hearts (9:3).

The conclusion confirms the atmosphere that has pervaded the narrative from start to finish: rather than Ahasuerus and Esther "living happily ever after," Esther is excluded, the couple receiving this fairytale ending being Ahasuerus and Mordecai.²²

From the royal perspective, Esther is thus the perfect choice to replace Vashti. The atmosphere in chapter 10 recalls that of chapter 1. The king has secured his rule across his fiefdom, and all is in order: men perform mighty acts, the records are kept in the royal annals, and the governmental system is intact. Holding no important position in the kingdom, Esther is a ghost, not even partaking in the traditional feminine role of childbearing. Just as she is unable to overcome the Otherness of her gender and mitigate the binary differences in order to become a leader, so she also never achieves the status of a mother-matriarch and thereby a seminal link in a royal dynasty. Remaining a prisoner in Ahasuerus's palace, she disappoints anyone seeking or expecting a change in gender roles.²³

Just as the ethnic problem takes a similar form as the gender issue at the beginning of the scroll, so at the end Esther's gender status also paral-

22. The disheartening gender result is reflected in the work of modern feminist midrashists, who seek to change the end of the book in an attempt to allow the small revolution that takes place in the middle but fades at the end to succeed; see, e.g., Wyler, "Esther," 111–35; Norma Rosen, *Biblical Women Unbound: Counter-Tales* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 173–81; Nicole Duran, "Who Wants to Marry a Persian King? Gender Games and Wars and the Book of Esther," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Semei-aSt 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 71–84.

23. Linda M. Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 60.

lels the Jewish's community position as an ethnic minority within a foreign state. Esther initiates no gender reforms, the patriarchal hierarchy remaining intact. Neither she nor Mordecai, representing the Jewish people, can look forward to any future: Esther does not become a mother, and Mordecai, unlike Haman, has no wife or children.

While the edict of destruction is averted and Mordecai continues to protect his brethren, he remains an Other. As demonstrated in Haman's rise and fall, his status depends entirely on Ahasuerus's whim. Although immortalized in the annals of Persian history, he is a marginal figure therein, merely featuring as a footnote in the history of a foreign nation. The final verse maintains Mordecai's sectorial position as one admired and respected solely by his own people, incapable of breaking through the boundaries of his Otherness. The sense of security is temporary at best. The emphasis laid on his concern for his brethren—"he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred" (10:3)—indicates that hatred toward the Jews continued to simmer in Persian society.²⁴

This reading is pessimistic with respect to both gender and ethnic Otherness. Just as the Jewish people can find no safety or security in exile, women can only survive by being obedient, passive, and marginal. Esther copes with her Otherness via a calibrated form of integration, stretching but never breaking the social boundaries. No sustainable alternative existence is possible, minorities and marginal groups always being vulnerable and at risk. Hatred toward one Other can easily be transferred to another. Any sense of security being temporary at best, no room exist for change. Vashti's, Esther's, and Mordecai's efforts all remain in vain, gender and ethnicity proving themselves to be inviolable categories. The Jews narrowly escape a grim fate, only being saved by the skin of their teeth by a woman who seeks to hide her identity, Mordecai's flaunting of his exposing the entire community to the threat of annihilation. The book's underlying message is thus that exilic Jewish existence is untenable.²⁵

While the story's ending emphasizes the fleeting effect of Esther's efforts, her courage and self-sacrifice should not be underestimated. Her valor could not guarantee long-term security, however. The temporary relief provided by Esther's actions is undermined by the sense of a missed opportunity for true change. Neither Jews/gentiles nor men/women forged

24. See Duran, "Who Wants to Marry," 76.

25. Shlomo Dov Goitein, *Bible Studies* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yavne, 1967), 63.

a new relationship between themselves, the system being maintained rather than overthrown in order to ensure a better result for the victims.²⁶ The only way to save the Jewish people in exile and ensure the safety of women in patriarchal society alike is thus to work within it.²⁷

This reading is only one of the possible understandings of the rich text of Esther. Was social stratification really so rigid in Persia, however? Does the book truly allow no movement for change? Perhaps the relationships between diverse social groups fluctuated and Esther developed. Perhaps, most important of all, can a voice not be discerned that celebrates the salvation of the Jews and entertains the possibility of a prosperous exilic Jewish existence?

2. Second Reading: Social Fluidity and Blurred Identities

This polyphonic reading differs fundamentally from the first, championing a broad liminal space in which borders are perceived as dynamic, flexible, and transcendable. Here the characters activate significant processes that undermine the borders of gender and ethnicity. As Bakhtin notes in this regard:

The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded.²⁸

The opening scenes, followed by many details later in the book, describe the patriarchal regime in preposterous terms.²⁹ Male law is ridiculed and

26. Only the items relating to this voice are cited here. The issue of how the reader deals with the two conflicting views is discussed in the conclusion.

27. See Susan Niditch, "Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism and Authority," in Brenner, *Feminist Companion to Esther*, 39–40.

28. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 21.

29. Kristin De Troyer argues that Esth 1 was authored by a woman, the rest of the book coming more traditionally from a masculine hand; see her "An Oriental Beauty Parlour: An Analysis of Esther 2.8–18 in the Hebrew, the Septuagint and the Second Greek text," in Brenner, *Feminist Companion to Esther*, 55 n. 1. For other polyphonic readings of Scripture, see, e.g., André LaCocque, *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008); Beana Belyavin, "A Literary Interpretation of Samson's Story Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Polyphony"

men—above all the king—and masculine fears are mocked. Ahasuerus is portrayed as a figure who spends his life wining and dining, always seeking the advice of others. Evoking empathy, in contrast, many modern feminists take Vashti as a model.³⁰

While Esther approaches the king uninvited, invading his personal space, and then requests his presence at her table, Vashti is deposed for refusing to attend the royal banquet. In a total reversal of gender roles, and a striking demonstration of his inconsistent and unstable character, Ahasuerus is enchanted by Esther's wiles.³¹ Esther is well aware of her objectives—and the best means of achieving them. From the moment she is unwillingly brought to the king's palace, she applies her skills to achieving the optimal result. Initially she follows Mordecai's instructions, intuiting that Mordecai is better informed about palace etiquette. She understands the importance of earning Hegai's trust in order to take advantage his knowledge and insight into the king's taste in women. Developing contacts with well-informed and influential sources, she wins their favor in order to promote her own objectives.

[Hebrew] (MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2016); Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature according to Bakhtin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Seong Whan Timothy Hyun, *Job the Unfinalizable: A Bakhtinian Reading of Job 1–11*, BibInt 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2103); David A. Bergen, "Bakhtin Revisits Deuteronomy: Narrative Theory and the Dialogical Event of Deut. 31:2 and 34:7," *JHS* 2 (1999), doi.org/10.5508/jhs.1999.v2.a4; Balu Savarikannu, "The Significance of Voices in Lamentations," unpublished paper, <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d2>; Penny van Toorn, "Dialogizing the Scriptures: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Novels of Rudy Wiebe," *Literature and Theology* 9 (1995): 439–48; Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes and David E. Orton, *The "Double Voice" of Her Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

30. See Mary Gendler, "The Restoration of Vashti," in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken, 1976), 241–47; Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Yael Shemesh, "The Metamorphoses of Vashti: Bible, Aggadah, Feminist Exegesis and Modern Feminist Midrash" [Hebrew], *Beit Miqra* 47 (2002): 356; Lucinda B. Chandler, "The Book of Esther," in *The Woman's Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: Dover, 2002), 86–88; Duran, "Who Wants to Marry," 71–84. Others regard Vashti as arrogant and foolish, contrasting her with the wise Esther who knows how to manage palace politics; see Lewis B. Paton, *The Book of Esther*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 150; Niditch, "Esther," 41.

31. Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 24.

On this reading, Esther's secrets empower her. Her silence may be an expression of her protest, concealing her identity and allowing her to absent herself from the space into which she has been forced. Although she obeys the king's command to present herself at the palace, she preserves her privacy, hiding her true identity from the men observing her. Keeping mute may thus be an act of ironic defiance against the system that has robbed her of her power and freedom of choice. Alternatively, Esther's dumbness can be viewed as manipulative, intended to promote her own interests. If the power of the Other lies in the ability to utilize restrictions to further one's own agenda, Esther exploits the silence Mordecai imposes on her in order to protect herself. This reading is reinforced by the final verse of chapter 4: "So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just *as Esther had commanded him*" (emphasis added). Hereby "the powerless has become the powerful."³² The change is dramatic: Esther initiates and acts, Mordecai accepting her authority.

Esther's call for a fast also directly flouts Persian norms as reflected in Esther. Numerous feasts are held herein, many of which form the setting for significant events in the kingdom. In bucking this trend, Esther defies the ruling culture, playing to the strengths of her own ethnic background and religion and enlisting the Jewish community's support. This is a significant stage of liberation in the maturation of the Other, constituting a vehicle for venting dissatisfaction and protest. Rather than following Mordecai's advice to entreat the king, Esther devises a logical plan that includes backup (Mordecai, the Jews, and her maidens fasting for her success) and a gradual and strategic process of interaction with Haman and the king in order to achieve her goal.³³

Esther's appeal to the king on behalf of her people constitutes a climactic moment in the story. She plans the move meticulously, every movement and statement being deliberate and rehearsed. Viewing Esther as an object—an obedient wife waiting for him to permit her to approach, thereby acknowledging his sovereignty—Ahasuerus is unaware that she has deliberately objectified herself. The initiative she takes is not solely hers, however, Mordecai having spurred her into action by forcing her to face reality: despite her royal status, she will suffer the same fate as her

32. White, "Esther: A Feminine Model," 170.

33. "This previously male-oriented young girl is finding strength from the support of a group of women" (Day, *Esther*, 90). See also Berman's observation ("Hadasah Bat Abihail," 656–57) that the maidens play a significant role in the process.

people. She *is* free to choose how she will approach the king, however. Mordecai's advice being only that she plead her case, Esther appears before Ahasuerus in royal apparel. Rather than approaching the king seductively in line with the gender role accorded all the other women in the book, she chooses a garment that reflects the role she wishes to play: the most beautiful of all the girls whom he has made queen and thus favors.

Although she presents herself for the king's inspection, she thus does so in full awareness of her status. Rather than conforming to social norms, she exploits them in the service of her needs and interests. Choosing to present herself as an object, she draws an analogy between her honor and the king's. As her patron, this compels him to protect her.³⁴ Her royal countenance is not just surface deep. Assuming a queenly role, she personifies the throne itself. The king subconsciously notes this special quality: "As soon as the king saw Queen Esther..." (5:3).

While on the first reading the delay in Esther's request reflects her slow and difficult emotional processing, here it appears to be an astute and deliberate act. Had Esther presented the king with her request in the first banquet, he would likely have rejected it, Haman being both powerful and in the king's favor. Susceptible to the influence of the people around him, Ahasuerus had better reasons to trust Haman than Esther. While a queen is expendable, a loyal advisor is harder to come by. Had the king dismissed Esther, Haman might have convinced the king to replace Esther—just as his advisors had with Vashti. In postponing her request, Esther utilizes her previously demonstrated strength of concealment. The king is now seduced by mystery rather than Esther's beauty, eager to learn the matter for which she is been willing to put her life on the line.

Esther invites the king into *her* sanctum, wherein she is mistress. In including Haman, she puts him off guard. Assuming he is in the queen's favor, Haman is oblivious to the danger. Both men are thus vulnerable: Haman cocky and Ahasuerus inquisitive. Esther both drives a wedge between the king and his minister and brings Ahasuerus closer. Thanks to Esther's manipulations, Haman finds himself alone, facing the royal couple: "Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen" (7:6).

After Haman's demise, Esther resumes her leadership role: "Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property" (8:2). This act recalls Ahasuerus's promotion of his minister in 3:1. While Mordecai is instated instead

34. Laniak, *Shame and Honor*, 114.

of Haman, Esther is painted in similar colors as Ahasuerus, apparently possessing the authority to give people positions in the kingdom at her own discretion.³⁵ Mordecai is thus brought to the palace because “Esther had revealed how he was related to her” (8:1). Once installed, Esther seeks to firmly entrench the changes she has initiated. Although Mordecai takes Haman’s place, he does not approach the king on his people’s behalf. This task is assumed by Esther.

Esther is initially described as mute and passive, but in practice she is cunning, brave, and caring. A skilled rhetorician, she knows how and when to intrigue Ahasuerus, which buttons to press to anger him, and the way to deflect the latter away from herself and toward her enemy. Her intimate knowledge of the system and palace politics enhances her power, and she uses her position to promote her agenda. In the final chapters of the book, Esther finally directly links herself with the events taking place outside the palace walls without relying on Mordecai’s intervention. Becoming active in the public domain, she assumes a leadership role.³⁶

If, as suggested above, Esther represents the Jewish people, her personal journey mirrors their status as an ethnic minority. Just as Esther shifts identities and frees herself from the constraints that limit her freedom to act, so her nation effectively throws off the title and condition of Other imposed upon it.³⁷ The book ends on a victorious note in both gender and ethnic terms. Esther initially conceals her background and gives the outward appearance of being a gentile, but at the end of the book “many of the people of the land professed to be Jews” (8:17). From a threatened woman/minority, she/they become a force to be reckoned with, protected by royal edict and given the license to defend herself/themselves. As a group, they also become a significant, sizable portion of society. Under such conditions, they have no need to return to Judah but can live safely and comfortably in the diaspora.³⁸ Rather than segregating themselves from local culture, they can seek to integrate within

35. Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 100–101.

36. Levenson, *Esther*, 13. The verses are rather ambiguous with regard to the twice-delivered letters. Are they sent by Mordecai, Esther and Mordecai, or Esther alone? Although it is easy to attribute the textual difficulties to an inept interweaving of numerous sources, the present analysis adopts a synchronic reading of the text along the lines suggested, *inter alia*, by LaCocque, *Esther Regina*, 154.

37. See LaCocque, *Esther Regina*, 126.

38. Day, *Esther*, 13; Laniak, “Esther’s ‘Volkcentrism,’” 80.

it.³⁹ The absence of any prominent Jewish religious or cultural features in the book of Esther reinforces the idea that Judaism does not prevent one from full assimilating into foreign society.⁴⁰

The links this reading exhibits with the exodus further support this reading.⁴¹ While the Israelites journeyed toward the promised land in order to establish an independent government in a sovereign state, here the Jews remain in diaspora under foreign rule. The two events—which both occur “In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan” (Esth 3:7)—are related to delivering the nation from the perils of exile. Esther offers an alternate solution to the exodus, however: the Jews can remain in the diaspora and achieve influential positions therein.⁴² “The message is not that Jerusalem and Zion do not matter, but that *aliyah* (return to Zion) is only one way to regain the center.”⁴³

On this reading, the possibility of a safe Jewish existence in exile proves that the boundaries between the social center and marginal groups are not as solid as they might appear. Men and women shift between various roles based on the needs and challenges of changing reality. Women can lead and initiate; men can be directed and guided. On the national and ethnic plane, the relationship between the Jewish people and foreign society is dynamic and flexible. As the story ends, the Jews have escaped physical annihilation but face the danger of assimilation and the obliteration of their unique identity.⁴⁴

39. Levenson, *Esther*, 133; cf. Sidnie Ann White, “Esther,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 129; David J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 262.

40. Athalya Brenner, “Esther Politicised in a Personal Context: Some Remarks on Foreignness,” *European Judaism* 32 (1999): 6–7; W. L. Humphreys, “Esther,” *IDBSup*, 279–81.

41. Gillis Gerleman, *Esther*, BKAT (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), who, noting the numerous links between the narratives, concludes that Esther formed an alternative to the exodus story. See also Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Ruth the New Abraham, Esther the New Moses,” *ChrCent* 100 (1983): 1130–34; Danna Nolan Fewell, ed., *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 13–14; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 289.

42. André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel’s Tradition*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 58; LaCocque, *Esther Regina*, 45, 127.

43. Laniak, “Esther’s ‘Volkcentrism,’” 90; Laniak, *Esther*, 185–87.

44. Rabbinic literature associates the idea of blurring one’s identity with Purim;

Conclusion

Like the residents of Shushan, the reader of the book of Esther can be “dumbfounded” in the face of the two different but equally convincing ways of reading the story. The exegetical pendulum swings between two opposing perspectives. (The book of) Esther may be understood as demonstrating both the art of negotiating social, gender, and ethnic space and the impervious nature of all these categories and constructs. Esther is either the quintessential Other who internalizes her limitations and marginality in society or an example of the person who meets challenges and assumes a leadership role in and responsibility for national processes. The story both preserves the oppressive hierarchal definition of women and Jews and celebrates Jewish victory and integration into Persian society, gained thanks to Esther. At the same time as ethnic and gender flexibility are celebrated, ethnic rigidity and unbreakable gender roles remain in force. While weak and marginal social groups such as women and Jews are constantly under threat, hope is held out of a form of coexistence that blurs gender and ethnic distinctions, allowing individuals to act freely within a broad range of options. Jews and Persians are interchangeable; men and women alike can assume leadership roles.

The book offers details and formulations that support both interpretations. The reader can understand Esther as a sophisticated woman capable of working within two population groups or as a weak one who complies with the rigid patriarchal structure and never achieves any status beyond that of (an) object. Persian society can similarly be viewed either as a guarded hierarchal society characterized by inflexible social boundaries or as much less strictly structured, permitting people to live on the borders and move freely between various groups. Finally, the Jewish people can be conceived as a persecuted minority living under the shadow of constant threat or as a group possessed of both the way and the will to integrate into the host society, drawing power and the promise of a better life from this ability even at the cost of their distinct identity.

The inconclusive ending reflects the complex nature of Jewish exilic life. The two stories coexist, the diasporic lifestyle embodying the tension of dual identities. This dyadism is expressed in literary form in the two

see Theodor H. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953), 215–32.

names—Jewish and Persian—Esther bears. These two identities create a dialogue between her two personae.⁴⁵

Despite Mordecai's and Esther's ultimate survival, some of the deeper-running problems remain unresolved, as does the plot as the whole. What happens to Esther? Does Mordecai bear sons who continue his legacy? Do Mordecai and Esther keep in close contact? Did a further edict necessitate Mordecai's intervention? These questions reinforce the feeling that the dual reading of Esther reflects the challenges of Jewish exilic existence. Ultimately the tension is left unrelieved. This reading of (the book of) Esther tugs the reader from one possibility to the other, creating a sense of irresolution and ambivalence.

Here we thus return to the suggestion raised at the beginning of this essay, namely, that the book symbolizes the relationship between marginalized groups and mainstream society via a female figure. The duality that has historically characterized the representation of women is a prominent cultural construct, finding form in philosophy and art from ancient times through to (post)modernity. On occasion, the image is split in two: the inferior, desired but diabolical woman versus the venerated and pure wife-mother. On others, it becomes a fixed principle: the good mother figure, associated with infancy (biological mother, fairy), and the bad mother figure (stepmother, evil witch). At still other times, it sets the dutiful, respectable woman against the temptress and prostitute.

The law-abiding wife and mother represents culture and proper order, the house, and the capacious, embracing womb. Her place lies within the borders, her role being to preserve the symbolic order from the imagined chaos that threatens to destroy it. In contrast, the Other W/woman—the foreigner—embodies the wild, the impure aspects of human culture. Existing beyond the boundaries of civilization, she represents the dangerous, chaotic, savage, erotic, seductive, and deathly forces that lurk outside.

The duality between internal and external, foreignness and belonging, exclusion and embrace in which women live is integrally interwoven into the dual reading of the text. (The book of) Esther addresses the relationship between inside and outside in dichotomous fashion. The female figure at the center of the book thus facilitates and fosters a story that is essentially dual in nature, her “double voice” highlighting the feminine

45. See Greenstein, “A Jewish Reading”; LaCocque, *Esther Regina*, 49.

way of life.⁴⁶ Personified in the text via the female protagonist who deals with the challenging question of her Otherness and relationship with the majority community, the book of Esther focuses upon belonging and foreignness. No one is thus better fitted than a woman, whose very physical and mental being embody the tension between the internal and external, to recount the story.

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46. See Athalya Brenner and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 27; Van Dijk-Hemmes and Orton, *The "Double Voice" of Her Desire*. Following Shlomo Dov Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 1–33, the former suggest that, as part of the dominant culture that drives women to the margins, their language reflects a unique "double voice" that includes both the hegemonic and the silenced female story. See also Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 268–70.

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Women, Men, and God: Hierarchical Triangle in the Hebrew Bible

Adi Marili

The Hebrew Bible uses varied terminology to express modes of communication between God and humans, ranging from language indicating talking and speech that is explicitly about communication to nonverbal gestures that are, in themselves, communicative.¹ These gestures are described using language, and many become idioms. A comparative examination of the bodily gestures and the varied phrases utilizing the names of body parts to describe communication between God and a human reveals something striking: in a decisive majority of instances, this language, in all its variety, is applied to male characters, while such phrases are absent from descriptions of female characters. On the contrary, the gesture-based expressions used to describe the relationship between males and God appear for females only in relation to males. In the few instances

I am honored to dedicate this essay to my teacher and supervisor, Prof. Edward L. Greenstein, who accompanied and guided me throughout my doctoral journey with wisdom and sensitivity. I am also grateful to Prof. Simeon Chavel for his illuminating advice.

1. Previous research on bodily gestures in the Bible: D. R. Ap-Thomas, "Notes on Some Terms Relating to Prayer," *VT* 6 (1956): 225–41; Mayer Irwin Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980); Paul A. Kruger, "'Nonverbal Communication' in the Hebrew Bible: A Few Comments," *JNSL* 24 (1998): 141–61; J. Eugene Botha, "Exploring Gesture and Nonverbal Communication in the Bible and the Ancient World: Some Initial Observations," *Neot* 30.1 (1996): 1–20; David Michael Calabro, "Ritual Gestures of Lifting, Extending, and Clasping the Hand(s) in Northwest Semitic Literature and Iconography" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014); John A. Davies, *Lift Up Your Heads: Nonverbal Communication and Related Body Imagery in the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018).

in which the same language is used to describe the relationship between women and God, the tone or circumstance is always negative.

Linguistic studies can reveal the social and gender-based assumptions that exist in society.² The research tools of semantic anthropology can open a window onto a society and the norms it practices, beyond the information that authors transmit to readers in the didactic biblical stories regarding various female characters who come into contact with God, in an agenda-driven form of direct depiction in a story. Therefore, whether directly or through one of God's representatives (e.g., Hagar, Rebekah, Samson's mother, and Hannah), we find that the written text includes subterranean lines of thought that reflect a more complex reality. It turns out that biblical authors considered women to be people who do not come into contact with the divine: God does not reveal himself to them, and they do not approach God using ritual gestures. Moreover, the portrait of society emerging from the text depicts a hierarchical power system in which men have power and status, are active in varied areas of life (in both the public and private realms), and engage in direct communication with the divine. Conversely, women are portrayed as people who are subject to the authority of men. They are active only in the domestic realm and do not merit communicating with God in positive contexts.³

In this essay I shall demonstrate, through an examination of the language used to denote the bodily gestures expressing connection between a human and God, that for the biblical authors there is a gendered hierarchy in God's relationships with humans. The following table consolidates all appearances of these sets of expressions and the frequency with which each phrase is used for males and females. Following the table, I discuss select phrases: first gestures that express communication between humans and God, followed by gestures in which divine communication with a human is described using a bodily gesture. For brevity's sake, not all examples

2. Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen & West, 1952; repr., New York: Free Press, 1968); Edward L. Greenstein, "Some Developments in the Study of Language and Some Implication for Interpreting Ancient Texts and Cultures," in *Semitic Linguistics: The State of the Art at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. S. Izre'el (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 441–79.

3. On this point, see the conclusions in Adi Marili, "Body, Language and Gender in the Bible; Semantic Examinations of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: 'Eye,' 'Hand' and 'Mouth'" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2017).

will be discussed, but all occurrences are tabulated in the table proper and documented in the notes at the end of the table.

Phrase	Attributed to male characters in relationship with		Attributed to female characters ⁴ in relationship with	
	God	humans	God	humans
להשתחות (to prostrate)	45 ^a	30 ^b	10 ^c	(3) ^d
לקוד (to bow)	3 ^e	6 ^f	2 ^g	0
לכרוע (to kneel)	3 ^h	3 ⁱ	0 ^j	0
ליפול על הפנים (to fall on one's face)	9 ^k	21 ^l	2 ^m	0
לעמוד לפני (to stand before)	31 ⁿ	28 ^o	6 ^p	3 ^q
לשאת יד (to lift a hand)	0	2 ^r	0	0
להרים יד (to raise a hand)	(1) ^s	3 (+1) ^t	0	0
לשאת כפים (to lift palms)	0	2 ^u	0	1 ^v
לפרוש כפים (to spread palms)	0	7 ^w	2 ^x	0
לפרוש יד (to spread a hand)	0 ^y	1 ^z	1 ^{aa}	0
לשאת עין ולראות (to lift an eye and see)	8 ^{ab}	10 ^{ac}	5 ^{ad}	0
לשאת עין אל (to lift an eye toward)	0	6 ^{ae}	2 ^{af}	0
עין אל (eye toward)	1 ^{ag}	3 ^{ah}	1 ^{ai}	0
לגעת על פה (to touch the mouth)	0	2 (+1) ^{aj}	0	0
לתת דבר בפה (to place a word in a mouth)	0	4 ^{ak}	0	0
לשים דבר בפה (to put a word in a mouth)	3 ^{al}	6 ^{am}	1 ^{an}	0
למצוא חן בעיני [מישהו] (to find favor in the eyes [of someone])	19 ^{ao}	12 (+ 2) ^{ap}	8 ^{aq}	0

Notes to Table:

a. The instances in which one man bows to another: Gen 22:5; 23:7, 12; 33:3; 42:6; 43:26, 28; 47:31; 48:12; 49:8; Exod 18:7; 1 Sam 20:41; 24:9; 28:14; 2 Sam 1:2; 9:6, 8;

4. The phrase “female characters” includes characters who are women as well as female images such as *בת ציון*, “daughter Zion,” in Isa 37:22.

14:22, 33; 15:5; 16:4; 18:21, 28; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:23, 47, 53; 2 Kgs 2:15; 1 Chr 21:21; 2 Chr 24:17; 25:14; 29:29–30; Esth 3:2, 5.

b. The instances in which bowing down to a deity (either the God of Israel or a foreign deity) is attributed to men: Gen 24:26, 48, 52; Exod 24:1; 34:8, Num 22:31; Deut 26:10; Josh 5:14; Judg 7:15; 1 Sam 1:3; 15:25, 30–31; 2 Sam 12:20; 15:32; 1 Kgs 16:31; 22:54; 2 Kgs 5:18; 21:3, 21; Isa 37:38; 44:15, 17; 49:7; Ezek 8:16; 46:2; Pss 5:8; 72:11; 138:2; 2 Chr 33:3. To these, we can add seventy-seven instances in which a general group prostrates to a deity.

c. The instances in which women prostrate to men: Gen 33:6–7; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 25:23, 41; 2 Sam 14:4; 1 Kgs 1:16, 31; 2 Kgs 4:37; Ps 45:12.

d. The attribution of this action to women is allowed only in instances where the context of the plural language indicates that it includes a man and a woman: Deut 17:3; 1 Sam 1:19, 28.

e. The instances in which men bow to other men: Gen 43:28; 1 Sam 24:9; 28:14.

f. The instances in which men bow in a religious context: Gen 24:26, 48; Exod 34:8; Num 22:31; 2 Chr 20:18, 30. To these we can add the instances in which a general group bows in a religious context: Exod 4:31; 12:27; 1 Chr 29:20; Neh 8:6.

g. In two instances, Bathsheba is said to bow before her son the king: 1 Kgs 1:16, 31.

h. The instances in which men kneel before men: 2 Kgs 1:13; Esth 3:2, 5. In one instance a man is described as kneeling before a woman: Judg 5:27. In addition, there are instances in which male characters kneel in general, without reference to any other specific character. See Judg 7:5–6; 11:35; 2 Sam 22:40; 2 Kgs 9:24; Isa 65:12; Ps 78:31; Job 31:10. A general group, using plural language, that kneels in a general manner: Pss 17:13; 18:40; 20:9; Job 4:4.

i. The instances in which men bow before a deity or as a ritual expression: 1 Kgs 8:54; 2 Chr 29:29; Ezra 9:5. The instances in which a general group kneels before a deity or as a ritual expression: 1 Kgs 19:18; 2 Chr 7:3; Isa 45:23; Pss 22:30; 72:9; 95:6.

j. There is one instance attributed to a woman, but she does not kneel before a character. Rather, the word is used for a movement of the body while giving birth: 1 Sam 4:19.

k. The instances in which men fall on their faces before male characters: Gen 44:14; 50:1, 18; Lev 26:7; Num 14:5; 2 Sam 9:6; 19:19; 1 Kgs 18:7; Esth 6:13.

l. The instances in which men fall on their faces before a deity or the representative of a deity: Gen 17:3, 17; Lev 9:24; Num 16:4, 22; 17:10; 20:6; Josh 5:14; 7:6, 10; Judg 13:20; 1 Kgs 18:39; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 11:13; 43:3; 44:4; Dan 8:17; 1 Chr 21:16; 2 Chr 20:18.

m. The instances in which falling on one's face is attributed to women are always in relationship to man: 1 Sam 25:23; Ruth 2:10. To these we might add that Esther falls at the feet of Ahasuerus in Esth 8:3.

n. The instances in which a man stands before a man: Gen 41:46; 43:15; 47:7; Exod 9:10–11; Lev 27:8; Num 3:6; 8:13; 16:9; 27:19, 21–22; 35:12; Deut 1:38; Josh 20:9, 6; 1 Sam 16:21–22; 1 Kgs 10:8; 12:6, 8; 2 Kgs 5:15; 8:9; 10:4; 2 Chr 9:7; 10:8; Jer 52:12; Ezek 44:11; Dan 1:5, 19; 2:2. There is one instance, Esth 4:5, in which a man stands before a woman. However, this is a passive action in which a eunuch stands before the queen.

o. The instances in which men stand before a deity: Gen 18:22; 19:27; Exod 17:6; Lev 9:5; Deut 18:7; 19:17; Judg 20:28; 1 Sam 6:20; 1 Kgs 3:15; 8:22; 17:1; 18:15; 19:11; 2 Kgs 3:14; 5:15–16; 8:11; 23:3; 2 Chr 6:12; 29:11; Jer 15:1; 18:20; 35:19; Ezek 22:30; 44:15; Zech 3:1, 3; Ps 106:23. To these we can add the instances in which a general group stands before a deity: Deut 10:8; 29:14; 1 Kgs 22:21; 2 Chr 18:20; 20:13; Ezra 9:15; Isa 66:22; Jer 7:10; 49:19; 50:44; Ezek 8:11; Ps 76:8.

p. The instances in which women stand before a person, always men, are: Num 27:2; 1 Kgs 1:2, 28; 3:16; 2 Kgs 4:12; Esth 8:4. There is one instance in which a woman stands before an animal: Lev 18:23.

q. In three instances women are described as standing before a deity; all refer to a woman who is suspected of adultery, who is passively stood before God by the priest: Num 5:16, 18, 30.

r. The instances in which men lift their hands to a deity: Lev 9:22; Ps 28:2. There is one instance in which lifting hands is attributed to a general group: Ps 134:2.

s. There is one instance in which a man raises his hand to an inanimate object: Num 20:11; there are two instances attributed to a general hand that is raised to a general population: Gen 41:44; Mic 5:8.

t. The instances in which men raise their hands to a deity: Gen 14:22; Exod 17:11. To these we can add the synonymous language of raising the right hand in Dan 12:7.

u. The instances in which men lift up their palms to a deity: Pss 63:5; 119:48.

v. The only instance in which lifting palms is attributed to a woman is Lam 2:19.

w. The instances in which men spread out their palms to a deity: Exod 9:29, 33; 1 Kgs 8:22; 2 Chr 6:12–13; Job 11:13; Ezra 9:5. To these we can add the instances in which a general group spread out their hands to a deity: 1 Kgs 8:38; 2 Chr 6:29; Isa 1:15; Ps 44:21.

x. The instances in which women spread out their palms to a person: Jer 4:31; Prov 31:20

y. The only instance in which spreading the hand is a general expression is Isa 25:11.

z. The only instance in which a man spreads his hand is Ps 143:6.

aa. The only instance in which a woman spreads her hand to a person is Lam. 1:17.

ab. The instances in which a man lifts up his eyes and sees other men: Gen 33:1; 37:25; 43:29; Judg 19:17; 2 Sam 13:34; 18:24. Gen 33:5 is the only instance in which the seeing is attributed to a woman, and Num 24:2 is the single instance of collective seeing. There are also many instances in which men lift up their eyes and see animals, nature, or a landscape. Many of these occur in the context of a divine vision: Gen 13:10, 14; 22:4, 13; 24:63; 31:10, 12; Deut 3:27; Dan 8:3.

ac. The instances in which a man lifts up his eyes and sees objects related to a deity, an angel or other divine representative in the form of a man or woman, or toward an inanimate object: Gen 18:2; Josh 5:13; 1 Chr 21:16; Zech 2:1, 5; 5:1, 5, 9; 6:1; Dan 10:5.

ad. The instances in which a woman lifts up her eyes and sees either her future husband or children returning from exile: Gen 24:64; Isa 49:18; 60:4; Jer 13:20. In one instance a woman is described as looking toward the horizon in a natural place. However, this reference in Jer 3:2 is to a place where she had illicit sexual relations.

ae. The instances in which a man lifts his eyes to a deity: Ezek 18:6, 12, 15; 33:2;

Pss 121:1; 123:1, 5. Only in two of these cases does a man lift his eyes to the God of Israel. To these we can add two instances in Ps 119 (vv. 82, 123) in which eyes that כלו "pine" (NJPS) refer to a man looking toward God.

af. The instances in which a woman lifts her eyes and the objects are men in a sexual context: Gen 39:7; Ezek 23:27.

ag. The only instance in which a male eye is directed to another man is Ps 123:2.

ah. The instances in which a man's eye is directed toward God: Pss 25:15; 123:2; 141:8.

ai. The only instance in which a female eye is directed to another woman is Ps 123:2.

aj. The instances in which God touches a male mouth are Isa 6:7 and Jer 1:9, to which touching the lips in Dan 10:16 should be added.

ak. The instances in which God places words in a male mouth: Jer 1:9; 5:14; Ezek 29:21; Ps 40:4. The instances in which God places words in a general mouth: Deut 18:18; 1 Kgs 22:23 = 2 Chr 18:22; Mic 3:5.

al. The instances in which a man puts words in a mouth of another man: Exod 4:15; Deut 31:19; Ezra 8:17.

am. The instances in which God puts words in a male mouth: Num 22:38; 23:5, 12, 16; Isa 51:16; 59:21.

an. Both instances in which a man puts words in the mouth of a woman relate to Joab placing words in the mouth of the wise woman from Tekoa: 2 Sam 14:3, 19. There are no instances in which a woman puts words in the mouth of another person.

ao. The instances in which men find favor in the eyes of other men: Gen 30:27; 32:6, 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25, 29; 50:4; Num 32:5; 1 Sam 16:22; 20:3, 29; 25:8; 27:5, 2 Sam 14:22; 16:4; 1 Kgs 11:19.

ap. These are the instances in which men find favor in the eyes of God: Gen 6:8; Exod 33:12–13, 16–17; 34:9; Num 11:11, 15; Judg 6:17; 2 Sam 15:25; Prov 3:4. Of these, eight refer to Moses, and five are conditional clauses, אם מצאתי חן בעיניך. In two instances there are two possible readings: in the eyes of God or the eyes of a person (Gen 18:3; 19:19).

aq. The instances in which women find favor in the eyes of men: Deut 24:1; 1 Sam 1:18; Ruth 2:2, 10, 13; Esth 5:8; 7:3; 8:5. There are no instances in which women or men find favor in the eyes of women.

Bodily Gestures of Communication between Humans and God

People approach God and express their relationship with God through a variety of human, bodily gestures, both spontaneously and as part of institutionalized ritual. The most common gestures are prostration, as an expression of submission and loyalty to God, and lifting one's hands up, as an expression of approaching a deity.⁵ These gestures are portrayed by

5. Other body gestures that express communication between humans and dei-

means of a variety of verbs and phrases. A clear majority of the gestures are attributed to a wide range of male characters, while each gesture is attributed to a single female character, and even in these instances the woman is accompanied by a man or acting at his instruction.

Gestures That Express Submission and Loyalty

1. להשתחוות

The verb להשתחוות, meaning to bend forward and lay at full-length, serves a variety of functions.⁶ This gesture is used before people of high status (e.g., Exod 18:7; 2 Sam 14:33),⁷ and when it is said to occur in the presence of a deity it serves a ritual role, whether honoring the God of Israel (e.g., 1 Sam 1:3; Isa 27:13) or other gods (e.g., Judg 2:12; 1 Kgs 11:33). From a gender perspective, a clear majority of the ritual prostrations are attributed to a range of male characters, while when female characters are described as prostrating the object of their prostration is male: Bilhah, Zilpah, Leah, and Rachel prostrate before Esau together with their children (Gen 33:6–7); Abigail prostrates before David (1 Sam 25:23, 41), as does the woman from Tekoa (2 Sam 14:4); Bathsheba prostrates before her son Solomon (1 Kgs 1:16; 31), the Shunammite woman before Elisha (2 Kgs 4:37), Ruth before Boaz (Ruth 2:10), and a foreign princess before a future king of Israel (Ps 45:12).

There are three instances that can be considered exceptions to this norm. They are formulated in the plural, and the context shows that they

ties include standing before someone, bending down, and crouching, all of which are attributed to men only. In addition, there are ritual acts in which a human serves a deity, such as praying, offering incense, and prostrating. A clear majority of these verbs are attributed to male characters. Hannah is the only woman to whom the verb להתפלל is attributed, and when the verb להקטיר is attributed to women it is always to foreign deities.

6. BDB, s.v. “שחַה,” 1005. See also Frank Polak, “Wyštḥu: A Group Formulae in Biblical Prose and Poetry” [Hebrew], in *Sha’arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov, and Weston W. Fields (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 83*.

7. There are two instances that challenge this definition: Solomon prostrates before his mother (1 Kgs 2:19), and foreigners of high status bow before the female character Zion (Isa 49:23; 60:14). The expressions of prostration in Isaiah illustrate the uniqueness of prostrating before a woman, because they are part of an eschatological vision.

are meant to include women. Thus the Deuteronomistic law: *איש או אשה אשר יעשה את הרע בעיני יהוה ... וילך ויעבד אלהים אחרים וישתחו להם* (Deut 17:2–3). The law attributes the possibility of prostrating to the population of women, but it does so in a negative context regarding foreign gods. Prostrating before the God of Israel is attributed only to Hannah, and this is also an instance of plural language that includes her husband Elkanah (1 Sam 1:19, 28). This joint prostration before the God of Israel is interesting because the text initially attributes the ritual to Elkanah alone: *ועלה בשלה האיש ההוא מעירו מימים ימימה להשתחות ולזבח ... בשלה* (1 Sam 1:3).

2. ליפול על הפנים

Another phrase, parallel to prostration, is *ליפול על הפנים*. The verb *נפל* (“fall”) is used in a variety of contexts to portray a person collapsing, in the literal sense of falling physically (e.g., Judg 3:25; 19:26; 2 Sam 4:4) and in a broader sense with metonymic and symbolic meanings (e.g., Exod 19:21; 1 Chr 20:8). When it is specified that the person falls on his or her own face, the gesture expresses honor and submission before the person or deities in whose presence the gesture occurs. Abigail and Ruth are the only female characters to whom falling on one’s face is attributed, and both fall on their faces before men: David and Boaz, respectively (1 Sam 25:23; Ruth 2:10). By contrast, male characters to whom this gesture is attributed fall before a man, the God of Israel, or God’s representative. There are no instances in which a female character falls on her face in the present of a deity or divine representative.

3. לקוד

The verb *לקוד* (“to bow”) appears fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible, always as an act prior to prostrating. When the act occurs before the God of Israel, it is attributed to male characters or to a collective of Israel (e.g., Exod 34:8; Neh 8:6). When someone bows before a person, that person is always male; this is true both when men are bowing (Gen 43:28; 1 Sam 28:14) and in the sole case of a woman who is described as bowing (Bathsheba, 1 Kgs 1:16, 31). There are no instances in which bowing before the God of Israel is attributed to a woman, as it is to male characters, and there are no instances in which a man bows before a woman.

Gestures That Express Approach and Petition

4. לשאת יד

The motion of *לשאת יד* indicates that the hand is raised up high.⁸ It most often represents a gesture of approaching another person, and it functions in varied roles.⁹ Oath taking is the most common use of the lifted-hand gesture, and this usage is attributed only to a divine hand.¹⁰ The gesture of lifting a hand expressed by the phrase *לשאת יד* is attributed to a human hand only twice. Both instances refer to men, without any reference to women. Aaron lifts his hand toward the people in a gesture that is understood as blessing (Lev 9:22),¹¹ and the speaker in Ps 28:2 lifts his hands in a gesture of petition and prayer.¹²

8. David Noel Freedman and Bruce E. Willoughby, “נָשָׂא,” *TDOT* 10:24; see also their list of etymological parallels in other Semitic languages, 10:25–27.

9. It is necessary to distinguish between the phrases *לשאת יד* and *לשאת יד בפלוגי*. The latter serves as an idiom for betrayal (2 Sam 18:28; 20:21). Only the former is being discussed here. For more on the uses of the gesture of lifting a hand, see Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*, 32–33; David Rolph Seely, “The Raised Hand of God as an Oath Gesture,” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 411–21.

10. Seely, “Raised Hand of God,” 411. There are seventeen such instances attributed to a divine hand, such as Exod 6:8; Num 14:30; Ezek 20:5–6. In fact, there only two instances in which the gesture of God raising God’s hand is used for other purposes: in Ps 10:12, the hands elicit a sign of blessing (as understood by Freedman and Willoughby, “נָשָׂא,” 37), and in Ps 106:26 they are an expression of aggressive hostility.

11. The text does not give a verbal blessing, so some interpreters supply the missing blessing. This is found in early commentaries, e.g., Sifra, Miluim Shmini 30; b. Sotah 38a, and the medieval Hebrew commentators Rashi and Nahmanides on the verse; as well as modern scholars, such as John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 123–24. It is also possible that lifting the hand is the blessing itself. Jacob Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 586–87) and Baruch A. Levine (*Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 57) understand that the hand is lifted towards heaven and only Aaron’s face is directed at the people. Therefore, they interpret the gesture as a nonverbal blessing.

12. Lifting hands as an expression of prayer also appears in Ugaritic, in the Legend of King Kirta, ša ydk šmm (*KTU* 1.14; 2:22–23); see *DULAT* 2:639. In Akkadian, the phrase *qāta našū* serves idiomatically for prayer, *CAD*, s.v. “*našū*,” 11.2:106–7. See also Edward L. Greenstein, “Trans-Semitic Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *m’kh*,” *UF* 11 (1979): 329–36. For a hand that is attributed to a collective, see

5. לשאת כפים

The phrase **לשאת כפים** appears three times in the Hebrew Bible. The gesture of lifting palms is always directed to God: whether metonymically, when addressing the name of God (Ps 63:5) or God's commandments (Ps 119:48);¹³ or directly, when a female character is commanded: **שאי אליו** (Lam 2:19). The gesture of a female character lifting her palms serves as an expression of prayer and pleading for mercy. Indeed, this is the only instance in which a phrase expressing direct communication with God is attributed to a female figure. However, even in this case the male voice is dominant. As opposed to the speakers in Ps 63 and 119, who declare in the first-person, **בשמך אשא כפי** (Ps 63:5) and **ואשא כפי אל מצותיך** (Ps 119:48) the woman in Lamentations is commanded to lift up her palms. The commandment in Lam 2:19 is puzzling because the text has already stated that the woman moved her hands in this gesture (Lam 1:17). Moreover, this command appears alongside a list of commands that all require essentially the same single action, weeping (2:18–19),¹⁴ an action that the woman does anyway (1:2). The speaker's insistence on commanding the female character to do what she is already doing in an authentic, spontaneous manner reveals his need to control the female population and reflects his attempt to make his mark and control the natural action of the woman.

This conclusion is sharpened by examining all instances when **עין** ("eye") is mentioned together with **דמעה** ("tear"). While tears from a male eye always appear in connection with the first-person, when the speaker or speakers testify that their eye is shedding a tear (e.g., Jer 8:23; 13:17),¹⁵

also Ps 134:2, where the hands lifted to bless God can be understood simply as a gesture of blessing (Freedman and Willoughby, "נָשָׂא," 10:37) and also as a prayer gesture, because a person blesses God in the hope that God will grant goodness, as one finds in the continuation of the psalm (Ps 134:3).

13. The female figure **חומת בת ציון** (Lam 2:18) is a synecdoche for the entire city of Jerusalem and its residents. Therefore, the object of the command is feminine singular, consistent with the grammatical gender of **חומה**. See Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 75; Dianne Bergant, *Lamentations*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 75.

14. For the picturesque language of these commands, see Marili, "Body, Language and Gender," 51–53.

15. See also Jer 14:17, Ps 116:8, Lam. 2:11, and the language attributed to a general eye in Jer 9:17.

tears from a female eye appear only in the language of commandment, in which the speaker demands that a female character control tears: מנעי חומת בת-ציון הורידו כנחל דמעה... (Jer 31:15) and קולך מבכי ועיניך מדמעה אל תדם בת עינך (Lam 2:18).¹⁶ The manner in which speakers in the Bible relate to tears of the female eye reflects the social-gender perception of the boundaries of the female body. While a man is responsible for his body—he is described as acting and activating it—the speakers refer to the female body as an object that can be controlled, even in the emotional dimension. The very command to shed tears can be considered an expression of speakers' control (or, perhaps, desire to control) the bodily fluids of women. In this way, expressions regarding tears from a female eye supplement other, long-recognized examples of attempts to regulate the female body.¹⁷

6. לפרוש כפים

The physical meaning of the gesture לפרוש כפים is to open the hand and reach forward and perhaps also upward.¹⁸ This motion is common as a gesture of address, most often to a deity. The natural movement of people raising their hands to heaven in the context of turning to their God is integrated into ritual acts and becomes a gesture of prayer. However, we find that these acts of addressing God are attributed only to men.

The movement of spreading palms is attributed to Moses (Exod 9:29, 23); Solomon (1 Kgs 8:22, 54; 2 Chr 6:12–13); a figure known as בת ציון, the “daughter Zion” (Jer 4:31); Job (Job 11:13); אשת חיל, the Capable Wife (Prov 31:20); and Ezra (Ezra 9:5).¹⁹ For all of the male characters, the gesture addresses God directly and is accompanied by direct speech to God,

16. In some instances דמעה is mentioned together with בכי (without explicit mention of an עין) for men. See Isa 16:9; Ezek 24:16; Mal 2:13; for a female figure, see Lam 1:2. For a comparative discussion of these instances, see Marili, “Body, Language and Gender,” 54–56.

17. This supplements the reading offered in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

18. HALOT 3:976. See also the translation in Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2 vols., AB 18–18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000–2009), 2:895.

19. The phrase also appears for collective palms, always as an approach to God. For a list of all appearances, see the table.

in plea or petition.²⁰ Therefore, this gesture is most often defined as a gesture of prayer and a component thereof.²¹

Conversely, when the gesture of spreading palms is attributed to a female character, it is not directed toward a deity. About the daughter Zion we find written: קול בת ציון תתיפח תפרש כפיה (Jer 4:31). The spread palms of this female image are not directed toward any particular character, and the gesture appears together with sounds of weeping and heavy breathing.²² These descriptions shed light on the emotional state of the character and express general despair. Her words, אוי נא לי כי עיפה נפשי להרגים (4:31), are not those of prayer or petition. Rather, they are a cry of pain and despair, of someone who is speaking to herself. At that point she finally understands that the people from whom she expected salvation will not help her, and she expresses aloud her frustration that, of all things, her soul longs for those who are killing her. Moreover, considering the previous description of the daughter Zion (4:30), it would be surprising for her to long for foreign men and wait for their rescue if she was also appealing to the God

20. In Job, the gesture of spreading his palms already serves in a metonymic sense to represent verbal prayer: הכינות לבך ופרשת אליו כפיך (Job 11:13). The meaning of הכינות לבך ("direct the heart") is preparation prior to speaking. The heart is understood as the organ responsible for speech (see, e.g., Gen 17:17; Ps 19:15; Job 8:10). Therefore one must "direct the heart" prior to speaking in prayer. See Edward L. Greenstein, "The Heart as an Organ of Speech in Biblical Hebrew," in *Festschrift for Richard C. Steiner*, ed. Mordechai Z. Cohen, Aaron Koller, and Adina Moshavi (New York: Yeshiva University; Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, forthcoming).

21. Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*, 25–26; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCBC, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 2:928; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 3 vols., AB 16–17A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966–1968), 3:324; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, 3 vols., HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 2:94; Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 293; Martin J. Mulder, *1 Kings 1–11*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 410. Regarding Job, even though speaking to God is not explicitly mentioned together with spreading the palms, the gesture is interpreted as an expression of prayer. See Samuel R. Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Job: Together with a New Translation*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1964), 109; Naftali Herz Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), 197; Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), 164. Compare this expression to the Assyrian expression *upnā-šu-iptā* "he opens his fists."

22. "To breathe heavily," from the root פח, BDB, 422; Yair Hoffman, *Jeremiah: Biblical Commentary for Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001), 194–95.

of Israel. Therefore, it seems that her cry of despair and distress is ethereal, a desperate cry emitted into open space.

The ideal woman described in the ode to a Capable Wife (Prov 31) is also described as spreading out her palms; however, she does it in a unique way, directed toward a person, *כפה פרשה לעני* (Prov 31:20).²³ The meaning of her gesture is understood from the context as an expression of helping the weak, even though the purpose for which she spreads her palm is not explicitly mentioned. It could be a bodily gesture that invites the poor person or a gesture of giving or handing something over, presumably charity or food.²⁴ The verb *לפרוש* may also be read in light of the description of starvation in Lamentations, *עוללים שאלו לחם פרש אין להם* (Lam 4:4), where the verb *לפרוש* refers to bread. This comparison suggests that the woman's action also implies a "slicing" of bread.²⁵ Regardless, the woman is described as one who possesses power and who uses her status in order to help those weaker than her.

The action of spreading palms is attributed to both men and women. However, only when attributed to men is it a ritual act of addressing a deity. For women, the gesture turns toward other people, whether in open space as an expression of despair or toward a disadvantaged person in need of support.

7. *לפרוש יד*

The phrase *לפרוש יד* appears five times in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶ It is attributed to a male character once by a speaker describing a hand gesture

23. There are two unique aspects to the way in which a phrase formed from the verb *לפרוש* ("to spread") and the noun *יד* ("hand") is used here. In terms of form, this is the only place in which the spread palm appears in the singular rather than in the dual form (e.g., Exod 9:33). Second, in terms of content, this is the only appearance of this phrase that is directed toward a weak person. Therefore, some commentators have taken these two points together and rightly concluded that *כף* ("palm") is used in the singular in order to distinguish this usage from the common meaning of the expression and to single out the meaning of helpfulness. See Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 2 vols. NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2:512.

24. For handing something over, see Waltke, *Proverbs* 2:52; for charity, see Fox, *Proverbs*, 2:895–96.

25. Abraham Ibn Ezra, commentary on Prov 31:20; Avigdor (Victor) Hurowitz, *Proverbs: Biblical Commentary for Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001), 601.

26. According to Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*, 43–44, the expression

accompanied by words addressed to God in prayer (Ps 143:6). The phrase is attributed to a woman in one instance, in which its meaning is not unequivocal. The female character Zion is described as stretching out her hands—*פרשה ציון בידיה, אין מנחם לה* (Lam 1:17)—but the text does not reveal to whom her hands are spread;²⁷ rather, it focuses on the response, or more precisely, the lack thereof. Neither human nor God responds to her appeal. This lack of attention emphasizes what was stated earlier in the chapter—*אין לה מנחם מכל אהביה כל רעיה בגדו בה היו לה לאיבים*—(1:2), and *רחק ממני מנחם משיב נפשי היו בני שוממים כי גבר אויב* (1:16)—and it intensifies the loneliness felt by the abandoned woman.²⁸ It is possible that her hand motion is directed toward God as a prayer gesture²⁹ or that it is the general movement of raising one's hands toward open space without any particular addressee, as a call for help and a plea for attention from the general public.³⁰ The latter possibility is more consistent with the overall picture that emerges from the chapter in which the widowed, bereft woman sits on the ground at the crossroads and laments her bitter fate, calling out to passersby: *לוא אליכם כל עברי דרך הביטו וראו אם יש מכאוב כמכאבי אשר עולל לי* (1:12). Therefore the gesture of her hands spread out to the sides can be understood as part of her attempt to attract attention, while still seated on the ground, desperately hoping for consideration and empathy.

Hebrew in a secondary phase, in the postexilic period, following the Aramaic translation or the original biblical expression *לפרוש כפים*, and thus he explains its rarity.

27. The preposition *ב* in *בידיה* serves as an alternative signification of the direct object. This use of *לפרוש יד* is unique. In the only other appearance of the phrase with the preposition *ב*, it serves to indicate place (Isa 25:11). See Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*, 42; Johan Renkema, *Lamentations*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 176.

28. Later, in Lam 1:17, the narrator reveals the reason for the woman's dire situation: God has commanded it, and therefore all of her lovers have abandoned her: *היתה ירושלם לנדה*. For the metaphor of *נידה* (menstrual impurity), see Kathleen O'Connor, "Lamentations," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 178–82; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 59.

29. Gruber, *Nonverbal Gestures*, 41–42. Compare Berlin, *Lamentations*, 57, 59.

30. Iain Provan, *Lamentations*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 52; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 176–77; Jacob Klein, *Lamentations: Biblical Commentary for Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2017), 122.

The movement of spreading hands appears one additional time in the same elegy, when it is attributed to a collective: *ידו פרש צר על כל מחמדיה* (Lam 1:10).³¹ However, this is a gesture for the purpose of taking something rather than addressing someone. The movement of the hands toward *מחמדיה*, all the “precious things” of the female character—everything that is dear to her heart, her intimate organs or valuable objects³²—represents taking ownership. This exceptional usage of a spread hand highlights the distinctiveness of the Capable Wife (Prov 31:20), who stretches her palm in order to assist someone who is weaker than she. In both instances the hand is spread toward another person, but whereas the Capable Wife extends herself beyond her realm in order to help, here an enemy army crosses its boundaries to plunder.

The phrase *יד לפרוש* is parallel to *לפרוש כפים*, and the phrases’ gender distinctions are similar in that neither is attributed to a woman as a gesture directly addressing a deity.

Gestures of God Communicating with Humans

God most often interacts with a person through speech—direct speech, revelation, or a dream (e.g., Gen 3:9; Exod 3:4; Deut 5:4–5; 1 Sam 3:4)—and these modes of interaction are portrayed using a variety of verbs related to speech. However, nonverbal gestures involving the human body are attributed to God when expressing God’s acts of communication with that person. These include touching the mouth, placing words in the mouth, and the like.³³ Examining the range of phrases used for this purpose reveals that they are always applied to male characters, who receive a divine touch. This is significant, given the fact that there are four women who are defined as prophets—Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4),

31. An additional instance of this gesture attributed to the collective is Isa 25:11, where the movement of spreading the hands remains on the physical level the description of the movements of a person swimming.

32. These two possibilities are, in the final analysis, compared to the sacred treasures and the city of Jerusalem; however, the word may also refer to children. For more on the various interpretations, see Provan, *Lamentations*, 46; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 143; Klein, *Lamentations*, 113.

33. Other gestures include holding a human’s hand (*להחזיק יד*), removing something from a human mouth (*להסיר מהפה*), God lifting God’s hand toward a person (*לשאת יד*), extending a divine hand in an action that touches a person to hit, touch, or suspend (*לשלוח יד להכות, לגעת או להושיע*).

Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14)—and that two of these women are portrayed as having experienced direct prophecy (Judg 4:6–7; 2 Kgs 22:16–20).³⁴ When the phrases relating to gestures entailing divine communication with humans are applied to women, they always describe human-male contact.

8. לגעת על הפה/שפתיים

One of the actions that symbolizes connection between a human and God is God touching the person's mouth. Three times in the Hebrew Bible male figures testify that they have been touched by a divine entity. The prophet speaking in Isa 6 declares that a seraph of God touched his mouth and lips with a live coal as a sign of purifying the prophet and preparing him to transmit the word of God (6:7). The prophet speaking in Jer 1 declares that God touched his mouth (1:9). Daniel declares that a divine representation with a human appearance touched his lips, and immediately his mouth opened (10:16). In these instances touching the human mouth symbolizes the transformation of the person touched into a spokesperson for God. As noted above, this action is attributed only to men.

9. לתת [דבר] בפה

The phrase לתת [דבר] בפה is used nine times in the Hebrew Bible; in eight instances God is the subject, placing words in a human mouth: the phrase symbolizes the person becoming a prophet who speaks the word of God.³⁵ In four instances the phrase is attributed to a male mouth. In prophetic literature, God announces the act of placing in the commissioning of Jeremiah (Jer 1:9) and, metaphorically speaking, in the prophecy of rage (5:14); in the book of Ezekiel the prophet's mouth is opened (Ezek 29:21); and in Psalms, when the speaker testifies that God has placed words in his mouth (Ps 40:4).³⁶ This phrase is never applied to a female figure, and no woman has the word of God placed in her mouth.

34. This also applies to the female figures whom the rabbinic tradition lists as prophets (b. Meg. 14a).

35. An exception to this rule is Eccl 5:5, where the subject places something in his own mouth.

36. Divine placement of words can also be attributed collectively to an undifferentiated group of prophets who are not identified by gender. For details, see the table above.

10. לשים [דבר] בפה

The phrase לשים [דבר] בפה is equivalent in meaning to לתת [דבר] בפה, and it appears eleven times in the Hebrew Bible.³⁷ In the book of Isaiah, God twice declares that God will put God's words in the mouth of the prophet who speaks (Isa 51:16; 59:21). Balaam declares that he will say only the words of God, and the narrator attests to the fact that this is indeed the case (Num 22:38; 23:5, 12, 16). The divine putting of words in a human-male mouth expresses fulfillment of the words of prophecy and effectively mandates adherence to the divine formulation.

On the other hand, when a male human puts words in a mouth, it is not necessary to adhere to the exact wording, and the phrase means transmitting the content and the message only. This usage appears with respect to three men: Moses, Ezra, and Joab. Moses and Ezra act on a male mouth (Exod 4:15; Deut 31:19; Ezra 8:17), while Joab acts on a female mouth. Later the text informs us: וישם יואב את הדברים בפיה (2 Sam 14:3). The woman from Tekoa herself testifies: עבדך יואב הוא צוני והוא שם בפי שפחתך את כל הדברים האלה (14:19). Here, too, a man putting words in a female mouth does not require adhering to a specific formula, as required when God is responsible for the action. This gives the woman the ability to maneuver and choose the wording of her statement, which explains the need to select a wise woman.

The phrase לשים [דבר] בפה is used primarily for prophets and for words of prophecy. In this meaning, it is attributed only to the mouths of men. When it is attributed to a female, the actor is a man. There is no mention of a female being given a divine word.

37. To this count we can add the metaphor וישם פי כחרב חדה (Isa 49:2), which differs from the phrase לשים [דבר] בפה syntactically but is similar in terms of semantic meaning. It is important to distinguish between the phrase לשים [דבר] בפה, which will be discussed below, and the phrase לשים על הפה, which has a different meaning. When the object applied to the mouth is a hand (as it is most frequently), the phrase signifies a readiness to listen fully to the other (e.g., Judg 18:19; Job 5:4). When the object placed on the mouth is the mouth of another, which occurs only once, the phrase refers only to the physical gesture, which is used for magical action or to heat the body (2 Kgs 4:34).

Conclusion

Examining the varied language used in the Hebrew Bible to portray communication between the deity and human beings reveals a clear gender distinction. The authors do not apply to women the same language that they apply to men when they describe the encounter between God and a human. The authors of the Hebrew Bible choose, consciously or unconsciously, not to apply to women and female figures the same gestures of communication that they apply to men. In so doing, they reflect their implicit social and gender assumptions and the ways in which they, as authors and editors, see the place of women in society and as regards divine ritual. In light of the significant differences in the use of the same language for men and women, it is clear that the authors did not attribute direct communication with God to the female population. When an appeal or a gesture related to the divine does appear, it is always in a negative context, such as punishment or idolatry. In the social hierarchy, men are placed above women, engaging in direct communication with God, while women are impeded by a glass ceiling that is broken only in negative contexts.

Does this picture necessarily reflect the reality that existed? We cannot know. However, it is clear that it does accurately reflect the authors' perspective on reality, in which only men have the ability to communicate with God. This distinction leaves many questions open: How might one explain the gap between what the narrator states explicitly (e.g., defining certain women as prophets and predicating verbs entailing communication with God to Hannah) and what is reflected implicitly in the narrator's words? Is there other language that the Hebrew Bible employs to portray communication with the divine that is unique to the female population? If there are texts in the Bible that were created by women and preserve the female voice, do they preserve a different attitude to women's ability to communicate with a deity? If so, how is the ability of women to communicate with the divine expressed? How is it characterized, and what makes it unique? These are questions that require further in-depth study.

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Awe-tism and the Biblical God

Ora Horn Prouser

Humankind's creation in the image of God is a basic tenet of Jewish religious thought. The Torah makes this clear. "Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness! ... God created humankind in the Divine image, in the image of God did God create it, male and female did God create them" (Gen 1:26–27).¹ In this first description of humankind, there is a fourfold repetition of the assertion that humans are created in God's image. This value is used to emphasize that humans are different from animals and as a directive for human actions and behavior.² While some have interpreted this image physically, others have added issues of gender, sexual orientation, cultural experiences, psychological health, ability/disability, and general personality.³

While theology and philosophy lead us to think of ourselves as bearing God's image, they also lead us to the corollary understanding that God

It is an honor to write in celebration of our teacher, Dr. Ed Greenstein. I am indebted to him for his rigorous teaching, his emphasis on creativity, and how he models a wide variety of disciplines in his research. No matter what the subject matter, he is always a teacher of Torah. I remain deeply grateful for the great privilege of being his student.

This paper is part of a forthcoming book project. I am grateful to the students in the class I taught on this topic at The Academy for Jewish Religion for their insights.

1. Translations of biblical verses follow Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, Schocken Bible 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). However, I have adapted the translations to make references to God gender-neutral.

2. This point is perhaps made even more strongly in Gen 9:1–7, where the emphasis is not only on the creation of humans in the divine image but also on the differentiation between humans and animals.

3. Louis Hoffman, Sandra Knight, Scott Boscoe-Huffman, and Sharon Stewart, "Diversity Issues and the God Image," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 9 (2008): 257–79, doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n03_13.

reflects our image. Although the Bible prohibits the creation of divine images (Exod 20:4), Scripture is full of descriptions of God's body and personhood. "The genius of Israel's religion as opposed to the others is its focus on the idea of the personhood of God. The idea is psychologically inevitable, built into the human psyche. It is, if you will, revelation."⁴ The prophets, for example, describe faces of God and various attributes of the divine person.⁵ The more that it was considered forbidden to use graphic representations of God, the more this representation made it into literary texts, with daring literary depictions.⁶ These representations allow us to imagine God's likeness and character. God "can be described in our image in the conviction that we were made in God's image, so that God is sufficiently like us for us to take mutual understanding to be an exquisite possibility."⁷

In a previous work I argued that one way of describing God's body is as disabled.⁸ A well-known verse in Ps 23 has traditionally been understood as referring to God as a shepherd lovingly leading a flock with a shepherd's crook: "Your rod and your staff they comfort me" (Ps 23:4). The words, however, do not necessarily refer to a shepherd's tool. The language literally means "your staff, and that upon which you lean, comfort me."⁹ It has been proposed that the reason that God needs to lean on a stick is to have sure footing, reflecting the fact that shepherds often walk on difficult terrain.¹⁰ It is just as easy, however, to understand God's walking stick as a cane¹¹ and to ponder what it would mean to have an image of a God who limps and who provides comfort to the reader through divine limping and dependence.

At first blush this may seem to be an unusual reading of the verse, but it works well with current research. There is great emphasis in the begin-

4. Yochanan Muffs, *The Personhood of God: Biblical Theology, Human Faith and the Divine Image* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005), 23.

5. Muffs, *Personhood of God*, 87.

6. Muffs, *Personhood of God*, 97–98.

7. John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1.

8. Ora Horn Prouser, *Esau's Blessing: How the Bible Embraces Those with Special Needs* (Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda, 2012), 119.

9. There is a wide variety of ways in which these words have been translated; see Michael Goulder, "David and Yahweh in Psalms 23 and 24," *JSOT* 30 (2006): 467.

10. Gene Rice, "An Exposition of Psalm 23" *Journal of Religious Thought* 52 (1995): 74.

11. There are multiple examples of this word in the context of a staff that is leaned on for support. See, e.g., 2 Kgs 18:21; Isa 36:6; Ezek 29:6.

ning of the psalm on characterizing God metaphorically.¹² Therefore, including another metaphor for God in the psalm is consistent. Verse 4 stands out in the psalm as a central verse, emphasizing the comfort the psalmist feels in frightening situations.¹³ While the word צלמות is a difficult one, it has been understood as signifying a barren place without provisions or a deep, narrow wadi,¹⁴ both of which are frightening places to walk. We see the speaker as comforted that God truly understands what is involved in having difficulty walking. A God who walks with a cane understands that walking can be hazardous and relates to the psalmist's fear. Thus the psalmist finds comfort specifically in a God with a physical disability or challenge.

Psalm 23 has been read as a pilgrimage psalm.¹⁵ Pilgrimage times must have been especially difficult for those with physical disabilities. Either they were not able to make the journey, or the travel was exceedingly difficult for them. It would thus be especially meaningful to those deeply feeling their limitations to relate to a God leaning on a cane.¹⁶

Further support for this reading can be found elsewhere in the Bible. Perhaps God's greatest act of salvation in the Bible is the exodus from Egypt. During the final plague, God פסח (passed over) Israelite homes. The root of this word generally defined as "passed over," in different forms, can also refer to limping or having a physical disability.¹⁷ Thus, did God pass over the homes, or did God limp by the houses of the Israelites, enacting this miraculous saving act while having a physical disability? While this is likely not the primary translation of the word, it is significant that at this moment of greatest salvation the reader hears in the word פסח a linguistic resonance of limping, the hint of an image of God dealing with a physical disability.¹⁸

Other approaches to God and disability have been presented. For example, John Hull, who is blind, identifies images of God in the Bible

12. Ron Tappy, "Psalm 23: Symbolism and Structure," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 271.

13. Tappy, "Psalm 23," 265.

14. Tappy, "Psalm 23," 277.

15. Mark S. Smith, "Setting and Rhetoric in Psalm 23," *JSOT* 41 (1988): 63.

16. The challenges pilgrimage posed for the disabled are discussed in b. Hag. 3a and Rashi ad loc.

17. See, e.g., Lev 21:18; 2 Sam 4:4; Isa 35:6.

18. A rarer meaning of the same root involves saving and protecting (see Isa 31:5). While that is not the meaning here, it is interesting to consider the implications for disability studies of the same root being used for both limping and saving.

as being beyond sight or not needing sight. As a blind person, Hull reads these verses literally as opposed to metaphorically.¹⁹ Others have tried to approach the biblical text from the perspective of a deaf person, thinking about God as deaf in a physical way or as a part of deaf culture.²⁰ Some work has been done giving psychological diagnoses to God's actions, such as evaluating God as bipolar, as obsessive-compulsive, or as narcissistic.²¹ Individuals may agree or disagree with these readings, but the motivation behind this endeavor is valuable for our purposes. Philip Browning Helsel explained that

some traditional images of God have been confusing, perplexing, and even harmful to people, and that a psychological approach can provide a helpful resource for reshaping these images. Such a process acknowledges that our images of God are important psychic representations that may need to be challenged in order to expand and transform. At the same time, this approach admits the importance and authority of these sacred texts and themes.²²

Nancy Eiesland discusses resymbolization in the context of a Christian view of a disabled God:

Resymbolization entails the deconstruction of dominant symbolic meanings and a reconstruction of those symbols, making them both liberatory for the marginalized group and unsettling for the dominant group. Resymbolization is radical symbol sedition.... the symbol can also give rise to subversive thought and action. A symbol can be reclaimed as part of a hidden history. It is this decentering of the dominant symbolic order that resists "normal" attitudes and unconscious prejudice.²³

19. See, e.g., Pss 97:1–2; 139:12; John M. Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 133–34.

20. Wayne Morris, *Theology without Words* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

21. See, e.g., Donald Capps, "God Diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 193–206; Nathan Carlin, "God's Melancholia," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 207–21; Philip Browning Helsel, "God Diagnosed with Bipolar I," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 183–91.

22. Philip Browning Helsel, "Introduction to Three Diagnoses of God," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 182.

23. Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 98.

Exploring the characterization of God through new eyes follows a path paved by previous scholars. Phyllis Tribble's early work using feminist criticism to examine the characterization of God identified a range of feminine imagery for God.²⁴ Tribble focused, for example, on texts that describe God as crying out in labor (Isa 42:14), as nursemaid (Isa 49:15), and as midwife (Pss 22:9–10; 71:6). She emphasized that God is not female but rather that God defies categorization by gender. Her point was not that this was a new reading that was being foisted upon the text but rather that this understanding comes to light only because the readers of text are thinking about women and gender in new ways and are thus open to new readings of the text. "Depatriarchalizing is not an operation which the exegete performs on the text. It is a hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it. Tradition history teaches that the meaning and function of biblical materials is fluid. As Scripture moves through history, it is appropriated for new settings."²⁵

Phyllis Bird also stated cogently the reason for a reevaluation of the understanding of humans being created in God's image. "The rationale for our reexamination of the passage is this: a new socio-theological context, characterized by new questions, perceptions and judgments, requires a new statement of the meaning of the passage in its primary OT context."²⁶ The same can be said for reading the biblical text through the lens of disability studies.²⁷ "The interpretation of the image of God has often reflected the *Zeitgeist* and has followed whatever emphasis happened to be current in psychology, or philosophy, or sociology, or theology."²⁸ Reading a God with disabilities leads to a different understanding of God and a new interpretation of what it means to be created in the image of God. "Resymbolization entails the deconstruction of dominant symbolic meanings and

24. Phyllis Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *JAAR* 41 (1973): 31–33.

25. Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," 48.

26. Phyllis A. Bird "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981): 134.

27. Queer theory can also be used in this endeavor as theorists "work to challenge and undercut any attempt to render 'identity' singular, fixed, or normal" (Deborah Beth Creamer, "Embracing Limits, Queering Embodiment: Creating/Creative Possibilities for Disability Theology," *JFSR* 26 [2010]: 126).

28. John T. Strong, "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel," *JBL* 127 (2008): 629.

a reconstitution of those symbols, making them both liberatory for the marginalized group and unsettling for the dominant group.”²⁹

Following in Phyllis Tribble’s and her colleagues’ footsteps, in this resymbolization of the divine image through the lens of disability studies we are exposing this reading, not imposing it. As disability studies has found its rightful place in academic pursuits, and as understanding of the differently abled in the contemporary world has grown and developed, we are ready to perceive new depictions of God within the text and within our theology. The Bible is full of such diverse and contradictory views of God; it behooves us to broaden and not limit our understanding of God. We need to keep “holding these depictions in creative tension, expecting that [they] reveal something about God. If we do not allow for a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ view of God then I fear we will construct an image of the divine that chooses between and even functionally eliminates substantial portions of the biblical witness.”³⁰

To this end, for the purposes of this paper we will explore reading God as having characteristics of one on the autism spectrum. Professional diagnostic tools characterize the autism spectrum as including two main criteria: persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction,³¹ including the tendency to recoil if touched without warning,³² and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.³³ Though social interactions are difficult and complicated to those on the autism spectrum, they can be important and the key to emotional regulation.³⁴ Characteristics of mild autism include lacking inborn social skills and an inability to read social cues. Individuals with mild autism appear to lack empathy. They avoid eye contact and are often preoccupied with a few interests about which they may be very knowledgeable. They may talk a lot, especially about a favorite subject, but these are usually one-sided conversations. There is also a tendency

29. Eiesland, *Disabled God*, 98.

30. W. Derek Suderman, “Wrestling with Violent Depictions of God: A Response to Eric Seibert’s *Disturbing Divine Behavior*,” *Direction* 40 (2011): 156.

31. Temple Grandin, *The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 108.

32. Barry M. Prizant, *Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 53.

33. Grandin, *Autistic Brain*, 108.

34. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 24.

to have heightened sensitivity, or sensory processing differences, leading to becoming overstimulated by loud noises, lights, or strong tastes or textures. A good way to explain this is that a person with autism has difficulty staying well-regulated physiologically and emotionally.³⁵ In addition, from the time that autism was first distinguished in 1943, one trait that was noticed by Leo Kanner was an “insistence on preservation of sameness.”³⁶

Autism has been described as a disability of trust. People with autism cannot trust their own bodies, their world, and other people.³⁷ Michael John Carley, an adult with autism, explained the anxiety that this situation engenders. “The opposite of anxiety isn’t calm, it’s trust.”³⁸ It should be made clear, however, that, although it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of autism, common parlance is that, “if you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” There is tremendous variety in how traits play out in different individuals.³⁹ While many of these characteristics can be limiting, some see advantages and positive elements to being mildly on the autism spectrum. The neurodiversity movement sees autism not as a disability but as just one more way of being human. Ari Ne’eman, founder of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, has claimed that “having autism—being autistic—represents but one more wrinkle in the fabric of humanity.... no one among us is living a life ‘unwrinkled.’”⁴⁰

This characterization of God is especially enlightening in reading cultic texts.⁴¹ To begin with, the first half of Leviticus presents a God who is far more distant than in the other books of the Torah.⁴² God speaks in

35. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 18–19.

36. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 22.

37. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 73.

38. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 73.

39. John Donovan and Caren Zucker, *In a Different Key: The Story of Autism* (New York: Crown, 2016), 371.

40. This is a matter of great controversy in the community of those with autism and their families. See, e.g., Donovan and Zucker, *In a Different Key*, 516, 518, 533.

41. When looking at God as having characteristics of autism, we see God having “tantrums.” These “tantrums” have lethal consequences because the character we are discussing is an omnipotent deity. This in no way should be understood to suggest that autism correlates with violence.

42. Paradoxically, these cultic texts also imagine God at God’s most immanent, actually being present in the holy structures.

the third-person and acts in a remote manner.⁴³ Priestly literature makes quite clear that everything related to the cult needs to be absolutely “perfect” (Lev 21:16–24; 22:20–25). This “perfection” is demanded in the priests and their bodies, in sacrificial animals, and in the treatment of ritual objects.⁴⁴ Any situation or any individual that veers from these laws is rejected or severely punished. “Nothing can be justified in this universe except in terms of the proper position in the spatial/temporal order whose rightness is the only justification for anything.”⁴⁵

It has often been theorized that this need for order and perfection in the temple and in all cultic actions stems from God’s perfection. As the world is full of death, disorder, and imperfection, it is essential that the temple be a place of order and perfection,⁴⁶ and the priest needed to be able to be ritually pure, of pure lineage, and without blemish.⁴⁷ This was emphasized at Sinai, when all Israel needed to be pure, as a ממלכת כהנים, a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6).⁴⁸ Even a groundbreaking scholar on Judaism and disabilities such as Judith Abrams described the need for priests to be perfect so that they could be fit for the company of angels and help mediate the space between humans and God.⁴⁹ This interpretation of the biblical text, assuming that those with disabilities cannot be perfect and do not have a rightful place in the divine realm, has been distressing to those with disabilities.

43. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33.

44. Bengtsson, for example, says that God desires perfection and that it is insulting to God to give God anything other than perfection. See Staffan Bengtsson, “On the Borderline—Representations of Disability in the Old Testament,” *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 16 (2014): 280–92. I am conscious that using the word *perfect* in this context is a judgment about the nature of the human body. I am using it so as to be consistent with the language of discussions in this area. However, an abled bodied person is not more “perfect” than one who is differently able.

45. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 39. Amos Yong has compared the idea of the disqualifying characteristics for priesthood with issues of “freaks” and “deviants”; see *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 84–85.

46. Judith Z. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1998), 16.

47. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability*, 23.

48. Just as the priests needed to be without blemish and without disability, the rabbis expressed that at Sinai no one had disabilities (Mek. Bahodesh 9 on Exod 20:15; Abrams, *Judaism and Disability*, 61.)

49. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability*, 23.

Thinking of God as being on the autism spectrum, however, offers a new narrative. Rather than seeing God as demanding perfection or as seeing individuals with disabilities as less than perfect, perhaps we can understand God as requiring an environment of a certain order and structure and as being unable to deviate from that structure. One individual with autism described his feeling of being refreshed and clear when working with order. He cared deeply about the order things came in and the need for things not to deviate from this structure.⁵⁰ In this view, rather than seeing God as demanding bodily perfection and disdaining disability, we can see the demand for cultic structure as our accommodating God's special needs. We can understand that, from the biblical perspective, when we are closest to God, in cultic worship and temple activities, we are careful that all is lined up exactly the way that God wants it, as an accommodation to a God for whom disorder is constitutionally distressing. We do not depart from that order even slightly because we know that God is not able to handle a deviation from that structure.

There are clear examples of God's inability to handle disruption to accepted order. These texts are often seen as describing a violent and punitive God. "There are some cases where the God of the Old Testament shows hardness or cruelty in a 'gratuitous' way, without humanity's culpability being established from the outset."⁵¹ Perhaps what appears to be cruelty or a punitive nature is actually a God on the spectrum.

A good illustration is when Uzzah is struck down while David brings the ark back to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6. This is a troubling text, as Uzzah seems to be punished for taking action quite literally in support of the sacred. In this new reading, however, from God's perspective all was going according to plan when suddenly Uzzah acted precipitously. It was understood that the ark was not to be touched, and by touching it Uzzah, regardless of his noble intentions, violated the rules. As autism is a disability of trust, the unexpected leads to feelings that the world has been violated and that all control and trust has been lost.⁵² The reaction to this event was a "tantrum" of sorts, a lashing out as an attempt to exert control. God's response can be seen as coming from a place of feeling threatened.

50. Naoki Higashida, *The Reason I Jump*, trans. Ka Yoshida and David Mitchell (New York: Random House, 2013), 70.

51. Thomas Römer, *Dark God: Cruelty, Sex, and Violence in the Old Testament* (New York: Paulist, 2013), 47.

52. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 73–75.

The killing of Uzzah was not simply a natural reaction to touching the ark. Some speak of the ark as being almost “electrified” and that touching it automatically led to being “electrocuted.” The text, however, expresses God’s response as a willful reaction. “YHWH’s anger flared up at Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of [his] carelessness” (2 Sam 6:7). There are distinct actions here. First God became angry at Uzzah, and then God struck him down. Nothing here was reflexive. This was God acting deliberately in response to feeling violated. From David’s perspective, however, God פָּרַץ, burst forth, at Uzzah, which sounds less conscious and deliberate (2 Sam 6:8).

An additional issue relates to being touched.⁵³ Many people with autism have specific issues about being touched and are clear about when and how they can be touched. If anything is considered not “appropriate,” then it can lead to lashing out. God had made it clear that the ark was not to be touched, and still Uzzah, regardless of his good intentions, touched it.

David’s response was anger or agitation, though it does not say that he was angry at anyone in particular (2 Sam 6:8). This emotion quickly led to fear. David decided to leave the ark at the home of Obed-edom the Gittite to see what would happen. When Obed-edom’s property flourished, David decided it was safe to attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:10–12). While David’s approach was certainly pragmatic, his response was extremely sensitive to a God with autism. David did not lash out at God. He may not have understood the “tantrum,” but he knew that anger would not help. God needed time to recover. David did not beseech God; he let God be. Ros Blackburn, a woman with autism, explained what helps her when she is panicked. “Don’t put your hands all over me, and don’t talk a lot to me. Support me in silence.”⁵⁴ In essence, that is what David did. He allowed God to recover until the Divine was ready to move on. God signaled that readiness by blessing the home of Obed-edom, and David, sensitively, read the signals and renewed the process of bringing the ark to Jerusalem.

A similar reading of the narrative of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, is possible. In Lev 10:1–2 Aaron’s sons present a sacrifice to God that was not commanded and that becomes an “outside fire.” During this process they themselves are consumed by a fire that emanates from God. As Leviticus is

53. Grandin, *Autistic Brain*, 8.

54. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 179.

a book that is ultimately about being in the presence of God, Lev 10 can be seen as the place where that relationship is most dramatically articulated.⁵⁵ This narrative is difficult to understand, as it does not make clear why the sons were killed.⁵⁶ Following our reading, however, the killing of Aaron's sons can be seen as a direct response to the break in the structure that is necessary to keep God regulated.

Nadab and Abihu's actions are an unfortunate mixture of acceptable and expected rites together with deviation from the norm. The materials they use, the firepans, the incense, the fire, are all typical priestly tools. The nine chapters leading up to this narrative are filled with standard sacrificial processes and rites, specifically fulfilling God's directives. Here, however, a major problem is that they were not commanded to bring this sacrifice. Previously God was in control, directing when and what kind of sacrifices should be performed, but Aaron's sons performed a cultic act that was specifically not commanded.⁵⁷ It was this, perhaps, that caused God to react. It was this that led the fire to be deemed an *אש זרה*, an outside fire. The fire was not foreign when Nadab and Abihu placed it on their firepans.⁵⁸ When it was presented before God, however, it became an *אש זרה*, an outside fire. Perhaps it was the unpredictability that led to God's perception that there was foreignness here. God's inability to adjust to an unpredictable action is evident once again.

Moses and Aaron's responses fit well with this reading. Aaron's silence seems to echo Ros Blackburn's statement. "Don't put your hands all over me, and don't talk a lot to me. Support me in silence. Support me with your presence."⁵⁹ Aaron did not react, speak, or cry out. While that must have been exceedingly difficult, it was exactly the response that God needed at the time. Moses then seems to offer directives to emphasize that all actions must fall into the category of expected behaviors in order to keep God regu-

55. Karen C. Eliassen, "Aaron's War Within: Story and Ritual in Leviticus 10," *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 20 (2000): 81.

56. Edward Greenstein wrote an important piece deconstructing Lev 10 that has influenced my thinking about this text. See Edward L. Greenstein, "Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 9 (1989): 43–71.

57. This reading finds support in Rashbam's reading of these verses, focusing on the fact that, by doing what they were not commanded to do, the sons of Aaron became collateral damage to God's fiery reaction.

58. Greenstein, "Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative," 58.

59. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 179.

lated. Repeatedly, Moses emphasizes that actions must follow the directives commanded by God, often through Moses (Lev 10:11, 13, 15, 18).

The conclusions drawn above impact on the reading of narrative texts as well. Creation in Gen 1 is an extremely orderly creation, with significant repetition in language and theme.⁶⁰ There is a ritualistic element to this portrayal, the need to say certain things in certain orders. Within each day of creation there is also great emphasis on structure in the separations of elements into categories, some as binary oppositions and some keeping like elements together. God's creation in Gen 1 first replaces the *תהו ובהו* with binary oppositions.⁶¹ These binary opposites that replace *תהו ובהו* are an essential part of the creation narrative, with God exerting control over the absence of an ordered universe.⁶² The creation of animals, however, puts like animals together in categories. "God said: Let the earth bring forth living beings after their kind, herd-animals, crawling things, and the wildlife of the earth after their kind! It was so. God made the wildlife of the earth after their kind, and the herd-animals after their kind, and all crawling things of the soil after their kind. God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:24–25). The phrase "after their kind" is repeated five times in two verses, accentuating the importance of categories and structure.

The world before creation is described as *תהו ובהו*, "wild and waste" (Gen 1:1–2). God immediately sets out to change this situation, perhaps because the lack of structure was intolerable to the Divine or to remove the threat of chaos from humankind.⁶³ Perhaps chaos, or lack of structure, was itself seen as an existential threat. When God praises each day, God reiterates that structure is morally and aesthetically "good."⁶⁴ These are thoughts and emotions consistent with a Creator on the autism spectrum.

60. Edward Greenstein's analysis of Gen 1 makes the point that it is possible to read Gen 1 both as a very structured creation and as one devoid of order, depending on one's approach. See Edward L. Greenstein, "Presenting Genesis 1 Constructively and Deconstructively," *Prooftexts* 21 (2001): 1–22.

61. Benjamin Urrutia "The Structure of Genesis, Chapter One," *Dialogue* 8 (1973): 3–4.

62. T. A. Perry, "A Poetics of Absence: The Structure and Meaning of Genesis 1.2," *JSOT* 58 (1993): 7.

63. J. Richard Middleton, "Created in the Image of a Violent God? The Ethical Problem of the Conquest of Chaos in Biblical Creation Texts," *Int* 58 (2004): 349.

64. Middleton, "Created in the Image," 353.

When autism is seen as a disability of trust,⁶⁵ elements of Gen 3 take on new meaning as well. In Gen 3, the beginning of human action after creation involves unpredictability. God sees that people cannot be trusted, which perhaps explains God's severe punishments. A God who is comfortable in a structured binary world would instinctively maintain that there are trees you can and cannot touch and would not consider touching the prohibited tree; it would not be a temptation. This explains why God put the tree in the garden, was so surprised and horrified that the people ate from the tree, and imposed such a severe punishment for doing so. Ros Blackburn explained: "Because I find it so difficult to predict the behavior of other people, what they do often comes across as very sudden and threatening to me."⁶⁶ Her response in these situations is to exert control.⁶⁷ The punishment that God imposes exerts control and reestablishes order: most important, a total separation between the divine and human worlds. The relationship needed to continue on God's terms.

In the following chapter, God's seeming lack of sensitivity to others' feelings is evident in God's conversation with Cain. God chooses Abel for no apparent reason.⁶⁸ When Cain reacts, God does not seem to comprehend Cain's pain. God is able to recognize human emotion but does not know how to process it. God responds to him in an almost incomprehensible verse (Gen 4:7). God's language is difficult for both Cain and the modern reader. Perhaps this is a very tragic conversation in which God is genuinely trying to help but cannot break through. God seems to be offering a binary view of the world, looking at good and evil, focusing on structure rather than engaging with understanding. Leaving Cain wallowing in pain through this seeming lack of empathy led to the murder of Abel. Significantly, it is not that God does not care, just that God seems unable "to see other people's discomfort."⁶⁹

A concern for order reappears soon afterward in the flood story. God's decision that humankind is evil immediately follows the episode where divine beings had sexual relations with human women, leading to a class

65. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 73.

66. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 78.

67. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 84.

68. Angela Y Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4:1–16," *JSP* (2001): 65–84.

69. Donovan and Zucker, *In a Different Key*, 500.

that did not fit neatly into either category (Gen 6:1–4).⁷⁰ This episode echoes the motif of crossing boundaries that occurred in the garden of Eden. There, too, the encroachment on the divine realm was feared.⁷¹ The severity of God's response in these cases is similar.

One struggle that many with autism face relates to emotional memory. When there is a painful, difficult, or frightening memory of a place, an individual with autism can panic when faced with a similar-looking place.⁷² This reaction is often incomprehensible to others until the trigger is identified. In this way, the antediluvian incident of the divine-human relations triggered God's memory of the garden of Eden. This memory of a lack of respect for the differentiation between human and divine realms perhaps led to God's intense response, the desire to destroy most of humankind.

God's response to this violation is a further attempt to exert control, to start again in a structured manner. God became very dysregulated, unable to control the Divine Self emotionally and "physiologically," and needed to fall back onto what was safe: numbers and structure.⁷³ God's response is not instinctive: we see God regretting the creation of humankind and planning to destroy them. God does not, however, give Noah time to absorb this information or to process this tragedy. God announces the destruction and immediately proceeds to give detailed instructions. Noah would probably have been in shock, but God's conversation does not allow for time to absorb, react, or respond. It is as if God does not understand that Noah had that need. God is feeling emotion, being sad and in pain. "Then YHWH was sorry that God had made humankind on earth, and it pained God's heart" (Gen 6:6). God, however, does not show empathy. That is what is missing in the conversation with Noah. God does not seem to empathize with the human and animal life that is being destroyed, nor with Noah who is living through and witnessing this horrific destruction.

God continues to misjudge or misunderstand humankind. In the tower of Babel narrative, the people were looking for connection and continuity. Their concern was that they would be scattered, and they desired social interaction and relationships (Gen 11:4). God does not understand

70. While these are two separate narratives, their juxtaposition allows for a narratological connection between the two.

71. David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1–11)," *JSTOT* 13 (1979): 36.

72. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 96.

73. Prizant, *Uniquely Human*, 18–20.

that need and attributes nefarious motives to their building. Perhaps God simply did not comprehend their desire and therefore misjudged the people, leading to the scattering of humankind. Perhaps God was once again surprised at the people's actions and did not know how to handle it without making them incapable of continuing. Perhaps God was uncomfortable with the divine inability to control people and to keep them acting in ways that felt safe to the Divine. What is clear is that human and divine motivations here were quite different, and each did not seem to be understood by the other.

Reading God as being on the autism spectrum opens several exegetical doors. Whether, with the neurodiversity movement, we view autism as another set of personality traits⁷⁴ or we view autism as a disability, we are expanding the already broad range of views of God in the Bible. A God manifesting traits familiarly associated with autism, or a God with disabilities, makes room for people to find theological and religious connection where they once felt theological and religious exclusion. While thinking about a God with such characteristics can be seen as adding theological difficulty to our understanding of God in the Bible, it need not be so. In some ways this reading alleviates theological difficulty as it explains texts otherwise understood to characterize God as cold and malevolent. Ultimately, as always, and as our teacher Ed Greenstein has shown, analysis of biblical text teaches us as much about ourselves as it does about the Bible.

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74. Donovan and Zucker, *In a Different Key*, 516.

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Indeterminacy of Meaning in the Art of Yehuda Levy-Aldema: The Case of “Teku” in the Sodom and Gomorrah Art Series (Gen 19:32)

Susanne Scholz

God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah and we don't know what the sin is.

In Gen. 19:30–38 we know what the sin is but there is no destruction.

That's the tension.

Yehuda Levy-Aldema in a skype conversation on 11 June 2017

Openness to biblical polysemy characterizes the work of Edward L. Greenstein. He recognizes that biblical meaning “flickers,”¹ indicating that methods grounded in an antiquarian-empiricist hermeneutic do not sufficiently value the linguistic instability of the biblical text. In his scholarship and teaching Greenstein has thus engaged newer methods, mostly developed in the field of literary studies, to open up unexpected/expected biblical meanings. Openness to textual ambiguity has, however, not turned the honoree of this volume into a proponent of hermeneutical anarchy. On the contrary, his recognition of the “possible irrationality or disorderliness”² of biblical literature strengthened his conviction that it fosters “a God-belief.”³ For instance, Greenstein states, “A God worthy of the name cannot be trammelled by rules, any more than an infinite God can be contained by names, by language.”⁴ Greenstein does not merely aim for multiple meanings for the sake of multiple meanings. Rather, he searches to identify glimpses of the tran-

1. Edward L. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” *Prooftexts* 9 (1989): 48.

2. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 62.

3. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 62.

4. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 64.

scendent in the biblical text interpreted with literary methods. Because of his hermeneutical acceptance of biblical ambiguity, his engagement with literary methods, and his quest for the ongoing theological merits of even the most cumbersome biblical passages, I have cherished Greenstein as a teacher, mentor, and colleague since I first met him in 1993 when he taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary. I am honored and delighted to contribute to his *Festschrift*.

Despite Ed's openness to textual ambiguity and literary criticism, he has not tackled visual biblical interpretations. This essay hopes to demonstrate that contemporary art can foster exegetical and hermeneutical insights valued and practiced by Ed throughout his scholarly life. I want to illustrate this point with the art of the Israeli artist Yehuda Levy-Aldema (b. 1957), who has been creating artworks on Sodom and Gomorrah since 2015. In my view, the more than thirty-seven artworks of Levy-Aldema's Sodom and Gomorrah series (with over one hundred in the planning stage) foster exegetical and theological-cultural insights, grounded in a sophisticated, highly symbolic, and abstract visual language that takes seriously the biblical text, its complex Jewish and Christian interpretation histories, Western art history in general, and contemporary social analysis. His art does not reproduce literalist, predictable, or otherwise stereotypical depictions of this famous biblical tale. It is not illustrative art, as done so often and then missing the opportunity to articulate substantive visual biblical meanings. Rather, like other contemporary artists, Levy-Aldema operates on a conceptual level that challenges viewers to engage his artworks with attention, care, and deliberate effort.

Four sections organize this essay on the hermeneutical merits of the Bible in contemporary art. The first section discusses the hermeneutical possibilities of the Bible in visual art, as illustrated in Levy-Aldema's art series on Sodom and Gomorrah. The second section examines one particular artwork of the series, called *TEKU=A Tie Outcome*, to showcase this artist's willingness, openness, and desire to move beyond illustrative or even literalist art on the Bible. The third section outlines Levy-Aldema's creative process necessary to produce the artworks of the Sodom and Gomorrah series. The fourth section offers some biographical information on the artist. A conclusion uplifts general hermeneutical aspects of Levy-Aldema's art as they relate to Greenstein's hermeneutical convictions.

Toward a Hermeneutics of the Bible in Visual Art:
The Contemporary Art of Yehuda Levy-Aldema

The more than thirty-seven sculptures of the Sodom and Gomorrah Series are abstract visual expressions of biblical meaning as interpreted by the artist, Yehuda Levy-Aldema. It needs to be stated that Levy-Aldema's art is *contemporary* art. This point is important not only because a living artist produced the art but also because Levy-Aldema's art is "all about looking ... in new ways," though not "at new things," as Gavin Spanierman, director of New York's Spanierman Modern Gallery, defines contemporary art,⁵ but at an "old" story. Like other contemporary artists, Levy-Aldema requires viewers to look at every detail and element of each piece. Viewers must look again and again to find new ways of seeing so that understanding will come. Viewers must ponder what each piece means and how it expresses the biblical text in the here and now. This looking refers to another feature characteristic of contemporary art. It evokes spontaneous and emotional responses, as Charles Moffett, the executive vice president at Sotheby's, suggests: "Contemporary art is a particularly visceral experience.... You either love something or you don't."⁶ Moffett loves contemporary art for its "special excitement," the "spark" he feels when he is engaged "with the way we think and feel today."⁷ Levy-Aldema acknowledges that his art aims to engage viewers on the intuitive level. He wants them to respond by asking questions about every detail of each sculpture and to be in conversation with him, as each piece focuses on a particular biblical phrase or word.

Levy-Aldema's Sodom and Gomorrah series has not yet been exhibited in a public forum, but it could and should be exhibited in a contemporary art museum. Since his works are abstract, no one would ever suspect that they involve the Bible. This is the strength and mystery of Levy-Aldema's art.⁸ Like any contemporary art, it requires additional

5. Brian Scott Lipton and Evie T. Joselow, "The Contemporary Art Movement: A New Way of Looking at the World," *Wall Street Journal* (2006): 3, <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d3> and <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d3a>.

6. Lipton and Joselow, "The Contemporary Art Movement," 1.

7. Lipton and Joselow, "The Contemporary Art Movement," 1.

8. Other contemporary artists, too, like to engage spirituality, especially when they locate themselves in the slow art movement; see note 11. See also Arden Reed, *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), esp. 75: "The following chapters will examine various ways that artists have responded to secularization by counterposing belief and

explanation. It is abstract, conceptual, and intellectual. It does not literally depict the biblical story, as past and present artists have done so regularly in their Bible-related art. Viewers of Levy-Aldema's artworks depend on the expertise of the artist to understand what they are looking at. This is a typical experience for visitors of contemporary art museums. The artist develops a symbolic language that is not immediately accessible. It must be learned. In the case of Levy-Aldema's Sodom and Gomorrah series, the visual language is innovative, but after some initial explanations it becomes more obvious than at the start of the viewing experience. In fact, his artworks cannot be easily forgotten once one has understood them. Luckily, Levy-Aldema likes to elaborate on his artworks, explaining what each feature, element, and part symbolizes and why he created them the way he did. Sometimes viewers learn that he himself is not fully conscious why he added this or that detail. He acknowledges that he welcomes conversations with others who "force" him to come up with explanations.⁹ Contemporary art is like that. It operates on the affective level, not depicting the world literally, accurately, or plainly. Levy-Aldema acknowledges the ultimate unknowability of his art when he states, "We can read my artworks to a certain extent and then it's unknown. I am talking about the language of art. Words are limited to language."¹⁰

Perhaps we also need to know that Levy-Aldema does not reduce the Sodom and Gomorrah story to Gen 18–19. He begins the story in Gen 11:23, where Lot's great-grandfather, Serug, is mentioned. He ends it in Gen 20:1, where Abraham leaves the destroyed area of Sodom and Gomorrah, abandoning his nephew with the two daughters who are never mentioned again in Genesis. Chapters and verses that do not directly refer to the story of Lot are currently excluded from Levy-Aldema's interpretation, such as the sister-wife tale (Gen 12:10–20) or the Hagar story (Gen 16). Levy-Aldema made another remarkable exegetical decision. Dividing Gen 11:23–20:1 into five episodes, he considers the last episode—the incestuous rape of Lot and his two daughters in 19:30–38—as the climax of the tale. They are:

disbelief, sincerity and irony.... That said, contemporary art continues to engage with spirituality.... Other artists aim to resituate the sacred within the mundane."

9. He acknowledges this point in a Skype conversation on 4 November 2018.

10. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 26 November 2017.

Episode 1: Gen 11:23–18:33 (11:23–12:4: The Terah Family; 12:5–13:12: The Journeys; 13:13–14:24: The Sodomites; 18:1–33: Abraham)

Episode 2: Gen 19:1–11 (The Angels)

Episode 3: Gen 19:12–23 (Lot)

Episode 4: Gen 19:24–29 (God)

Episode 5: Gen 19:30–20:1 (The Daughters)

In other words, one of the most overlooked passages, Gen 19:30–38, becomes the most important episode in Levy-Aldema's reading. In fact, the artist plans to create forty-two pieces for verses 30–38 alone, with thirteen pieces already in existence.¹¹ No other artist has spent that much time and effort on this particular biblical passage. More commonly, artists who deal with the story on the incestuous rape produce *one* artwork, as, for instance, the famous sixteenth-century painting entitled "Lot and His Daughters" (ca. 1613–1614), by the renowned Flemish painter Peter Paul *Rubens*.¹²

Most interestingly, Levy-Aldema does not conceptualize his artworks on verses 30–38 as a salacious nudity scene between an older man and two younger women, as has so persistently been the case in Western art.¹³ In

11. For the growing list, see the artist's website at <http://www.levy-aldema.com/sodom-and-gomorra>.

12. See <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d4>. For a doctoral dissertation on sixteenth-century artworks on Gen 19:30–38, see Joshua B. Kind, "The Drunken Lot and His Daughters: An Iconographical Study of the Uses of This Theme in the Visual Arts from 1500–1650, and Its Bases in Exegetical and Literary History" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1967); Netty van de Kamp, "Die Genesis: Die Urgeschichte und die Geschichte der Erzväter," in *Im Lichte Rembrandts: Das Alte Testament im Goldenen Zeitalter der niederländischen Kunst*, ed. Christian Tümpel (Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1994), esp. 32–34. See also the analysis by the feminist biblical scholar, J. Cheryl Exum, "Desire Distorted and Exhibited: Lot and His Daughters in Psychoanalysis, Painting, and Film," in *"A Wise and Discrening Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 83–103.

13. See, e.g., Adam Eaker, "Human Drama and Psychological Insight: Ruben's Lot and His Daughters," <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d4>. See also Ruth Mellinkoff, "Titian's Pastoral Scene: A Unique Rendition of Lot and His Daughters," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 828–63; Ann Lowenthal, "Lot and His Daughters as Moral Dilemma," in *The Age of Rembrandt: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, ed. Roland Fleischer and Susan S. Munshower (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 1988), 13–27.

fact, Levy-Aldema's abstract conceptualization does not show any flesh at all, so that any explicit image remains firmly located in the imagination of the viewers. They need to grasp what the artwork depicts in order to know what they are looking at and how the artwork relates to the particular biblical passage. On the surface, the sculptures consist of various forms of wood, plastic pieces, pastel and acrylic colors, wires, stones, and photographs. Certainly no literal or even graphic depictions illustrate the text. Only abstract symbols articulate the visual meaning. Each artwork requires associating the visual elements with the biblical text to understand the artist's interpretation, who insists that his art is "a tool to understand the Bible" if interpreters listen for the "sound of silence" in the text.¹⁴ Viewers must thus be willing to move into the artist's "visual world" that is considerably different from "the semantic world."¹⁵ This process ensures a slow-reading experience, and, unsurprisingly, Levy-Aldema defines his art as "slow art."¹⁶ That the artist is willing to break new exegetical ground is clear to anyone looking at Levy-Aldema's sculptures.

The Artwork

My life is part of my artwork.

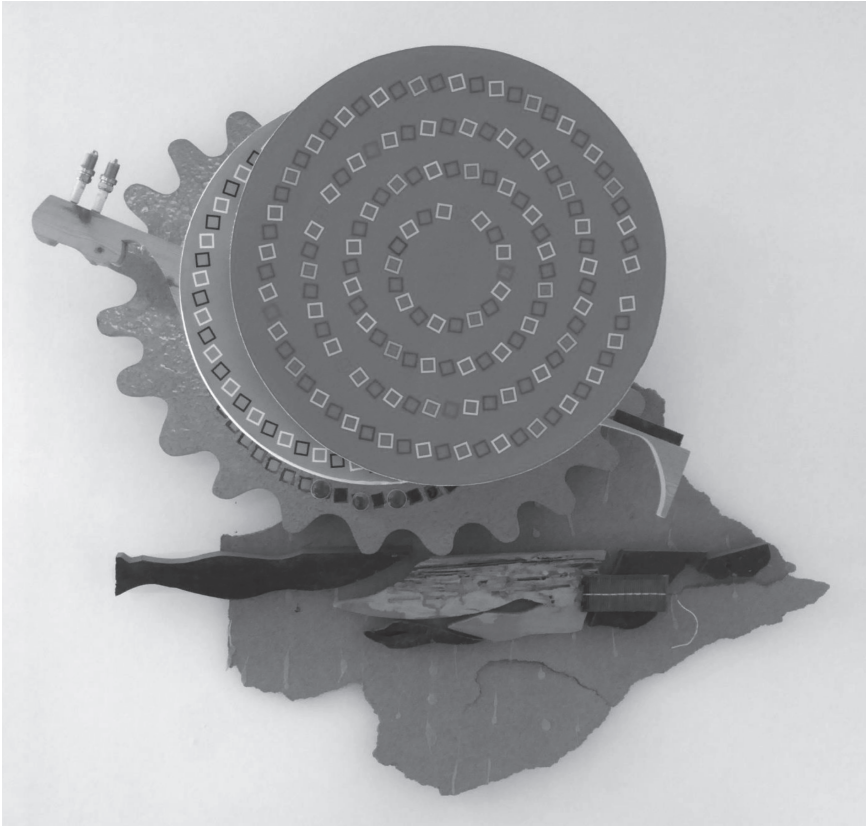
Yehuda Levy-Aldema in a Skype conversation on 23 July 2017

From 2017 to 2019, Levy-Aldema created the artwork entitled *TEKU=A Tie Outcome*. Its size is 97 x 92 x 58 cm, and it consists of cork board with hot-glue stoppers, pine wood, white wood, crystal salt from the Dead Sea, a little solar panel, metallic color, two spark plugs, a piece of iron, coal-tar paint, acrylic paints, seven red reflectors, seven knives, plaster,

14. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 16 July 2017.

15. In a skype conversation with the artist on 9 July 2017.

16. For the slow movement in general, see, e.g., Carl Honore, *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed* (New York: HarperOne, 2004). For the slow art movement, see, e.g., Reed, *Slow Art*; Michael Findlay, *Seeing Slowly: Looking at Modern Art* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017); Shari Tishman, *Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Learning through Observation* (New York: Routledge, 2018). There is also a book for the academy: Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). Interestingly, Reed defines slow art as "the sacred gaze adapted to modernity" (76). In his view, slow art "began roughly 250 years ago as a movement of resistance that contested dominant social conditions" (73).



Permission to reproduce this image given by the artist, who took the photo.

band-saw blade, and a photograph. *TEKU* interprets two Hebrew words, *וְנִשְׁכָּבָה עִמּוֹ* (*wəniškābā 'immō*, literally, “and let us sleep with him”), that the older daughter speaks to the younger daughter in Gen 19:32. The two Hebrew words (the *qal* cohortative in the first-person plural of *שָׁכַב* and the preposition *עִם* with a third-person masculine singular suffix) raise many questions: What does the phrase *וְנִשְׁכָּבָה עִמּוֹ* mean beyond the literal translation? What happens in our mind when we hear this phrase? How do we imagine the older daughter saying these words to her younger sister? Does she speak matter-of-factly, or is she filled with enthusiasm and eagerness? Is she sad and fearful, or is she bossy and commanding like a sergeant with her troops? Do we imagine her as a willing participant, or is her tone functional like a doctor who considers the naked patient on the examination table? Do we believe her words, and what do we see? Or would we rather

move on and away from this scene? Whatever we see, hear, or think, one point is clear: the artist wants us to remain at the scene, not hurrying away or ignoring the whole thing, as generations of biblical scholars have done. With this sculpture he forces us to slow down, to stay with the text, and to ponder what the artwork's two wheels have to do with it.

More questions emerge. They begin with the title of the work. Why is it called *TEKU=A Tie Outcome*? Anyone who ever studied the Talmud knows that the word *teku* (תִּיקוֹ) appears in the Gemara when the rabbis cannot decide an issue under consideration. In Hebrew *teku* means "let it stand, i.e. the question remains undecided."¹⁷ The name of the sculpture gives viewers a clue that something cannot be decided here. It has to do with the elder daughter's proposition. Do we believe her? How does the younger sister, who never speaks a single word in the entire passage, respond? What about their father, Lot? Do we accept that the plain meaning of the two words is possible, that the elder daughter would indeed propose incestuous sex with the father? What does such acceptance tell us about our views of women and their fathers? As Levy-Aldema always asks: Can this be?

So let's take a closer look at the artwork. We see two wheels. The wheel in the back is painted in metallic, industrial green and contains four circles that feature square holes colored in alternating red and green. A few of those holes are filled with red and round reflectors. The wheel's shape is similar to a chainring of a bicycle, perhaps like one of the newly designed bicycle chainrings that give riders "enhanced power output and performance by eliminating their dead spot during each pedal stroke."¹⁸ The wheel would be going down in a push and pull movement, suggesting the act itself. It implies that the movement requires much effort; it does not come easily, needing great will of execution. In the front is a red wheel; it is an "illusion wheel." Painted on it are four circles that consist of purple and yellow little squares. The pattern copies "Pinna's intertwining illusion," so named after its designer, the psychologist and vision scientist, Baingio Pinna, at the University of Sassari in Italy.¹⁹ The four circles create a visual illusion of the circles as intertwining, although they are actually concentric.

Both wheels are 35 cm apart from each other. They are connected by a stick on which a female figure floats made from pine wood. She consists of

17. See, e.g., Jastrow, 1331.

18. So explained at <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d5>.

19. See http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Pinna_illusion; see also <https://www.uniss.it/ugov/person/3381>.

the basics: a head, breasts, and long legs. The head and legs are far enough apart to stick out from behind the illusion wheel. A closer look reveals that the wooden female body is cut into half from the head to just below the breasts. On top of the female figure's head rest brand-new, never-used spark plugs that start car engines. There are two of them to distinguish her feelings and the logical elements of the imagined act; each needs a starter. On top of her legs are two pieces of salt stones from Mount Sodom, and on top of her heels lies a rectangular, small piece of iron. Her legs and feet are weighted down, as if hinting at her memories of Sodom when her father offered his daughters to the mob; she can barely get moving. Invisible in the photo, the backside of the wheels feature seven sharp knives that are bent in different directions. If the wheels moved, the female figure would get seriously injured, symbolizing the sexual violence implied in the visual interpretation of the biblical text.

Below the two wheels and the female wooden figure is another wooden figure that is attached to a piece of fragmented cork. It is partially painted in coal-tar paint, a black color that penetrates any material onto which it is painted. The "male" figure is placed in the opposite direction to the female figure above it. The head, neck, genitals, and legs are painted in black, whereas the torso appears in the original wooden color. The torso looks as if it is eaten up by worms. A small solar panel attaches to his neck and heart area with two unattached wires, one in red and the other in white, hanging out of the panel. Would it be possible to connect the wires to the spark plugs placed on the female figure's head if the wheels were moved? But wait! The 69 position of the two figures prevents this possibility because the spark plugs and the wires would always remain too far apart. What is the message here? Is the whole thing an illusion? Clearly, something is not right. Is it that the textual meaning cannot be, that the elder daughter would never say such a thing, and that the father is already eaten up by his incestuous desire? Does the artwork suggest that he does the deed and that her question is an illusion and that the text says what it does not mean? Perhaps a feminist *teku* is in order because incest between father and daughter is not initiated by the daughters, as social-scientific research shows abundantly.²⁰

20. For a classic analysis, see, e.g., Bruno M. Cormier, Miriam Kennedy, and Jadwiga Sangowicz, "Psychodynamics of Father Daughter Incest," *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* 7 (1962): 206: "The fathers almost invariably claim that the daughters were provocative, or in any event willing."

Finally, another visual ambiguity appears in *TEKU*. A photograph is attached to the stick connecting both wheels. The photograph shows a wooden wheel and a knife sharpened by the wheel. But wood never sharpens metal! Does the photo hint at contemporary Hebrew slang according to which a penis is like a knife?²¹ Is this another illusion to communicate the idea that the two words of the elder daughter cannot be? The artist explains that the ambiguity is further heightened in Gen. Rab. 52.4, turning the biblical text on its head when it comments on Gen 20:1:

שְׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לוֹט בֶּן אֲחֵי אַבְרָהָם בָּא עַל שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹתָיו

As people would say: “Lot, Abraham’s nephew, has been intimate with his two daughters.”²²

In other words, the sages of Bereshit Rabbah acknowledge the possibility that the father is the incestuous rape’s initiator as he “came onto” (בָּא עַל) them. Rashi mentions this statement in his discussion on Gen 20:1,²³ which is significant because Rashi is one of the most esteemed medieval commentators in the Jewish tradition. Bereshit Rabbah 52.3 also mentions that “Lot was foolish with his tongue, for he should have said to his daughter, ‘Shall we commit that sin for which the whole world was punished?’” (Gen. Rab. 52.3). The contemporary artist puts enough visual ambiguities into the artwork of *TEKU* to articulate the tension of the literal meaning and to recognize the impossibility of the two words in Gen 19:32.

So the question is whether we think differently about the two Hebrew words עִמּוֹ וְנִשְׁכְּבָהּ after looking at *TEKU*. Has our reflection deepened? What do we make of עִמּוֹ, with him, now? Does the preposition “with” signify Lot’s passive acceptance while the daughter plans the rape? Or do we see a verbal coverup for the father in which the older daughter is the mastermind of the incest yet-to-come? It is also important to recognize that the two Hebrew words of verse 32 express only the idea what to do, but they do not yet depict the actual deed. Why does the text prepare the read-

21. For an interesting review of this linguistic possibility, see Michael Handelzalts, “How One Hebrew Letter Came to Mean Both ‘Penis’ and ‘Weapon,’” *Haaretz* (15 October 2013), <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d6>.

22. See <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d7>. For an English translation, see <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d8>.

23. See <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706d9>.

ers in this fashion? Do readers need preparation to accept what cannot be? Or do they believe without hesitation what they read? If so, does the readily lack of resistance not indicate the considerable androcentric bias that insists on daughterly agency against all odds? Finally, we must recognize that few Western artists doubted what they read before putting their visual depictions on display for centuries to come.

Clearly, then, *TEKU* is different. It challenges viewers to ask questions about a tough proposition. Ultimately, questions are what Levy-Aldema is after. He wants viewers to question the plain meaning of the text. He explains, "I want to ask questions. My belief is to be in the questions of things!"²⁴ Most importantly, he recognizes, "We don't have answers, but we can ask questions.... To stand in the lineage of people asking questions is a huge honor. I do it in visual language, not words."²⁵ The interest to raise questions may, in fact, reveal his Israeli artistic sensibilities more than he himself realizes. The former chief curator of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, Yigal Zalmona, observed in 2010 that "many contemporary Israeli artists ... accept ... the conflicts inherent in Israeli life and recogniz[e] that the concept of identity must be framed as a question rather than an answer."²⁶ In line with this general tendency among Israeli artists, Levy-Aldema nurtures the expression of visual, linguistic, and hermeneutical ambiguity. He asserts forcefully, "Everything is about having a question."²⁷ Yet the insistence on the need to raise questions is also related to Levy-Aldema's theology. He is convinced that "you are much closer to God when you ask questions."²⁸ Accordingly, *TEKU* encourages us to reevaluate the long-standing exegetical willingness to accept the plain meaning of Gen 19:32. The artwork calls the two Hebrew words out as an illusion to what is "really" going on in that cave. A feminist *teku* is indeed in order.

24. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 18 June 2017.

25. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 10 December 2017.

26. Yigal Zalmona, *A Century of Israeli Art* (Farnham, Surrey: Lund Humphries; Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2010), 491.

27. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 4 June 2017.

28. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 4 March 2018.

The Process

My artworks are tools for interpreting the Bible.

I need time. I need people.

Yehuda Levy-Aldema in a Skype conversation on 23 July 2017

Although Levy-Aldema decided to make the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative the foundation for his art, all along he has been in conversation with various *havruta* partners. It seems that, as a practicing Jew, he is quite comfortable engaging in this traditional rabbinic approach to talmudic study in which a small group of students discusses a shared text. The only difference in his process is that his *havruta* study focuses on the Bible and his art. Levy-Aldema enjoys sharing his art-making process with his conversation partners, inviting them to come up with ideas because he will seriously consider their suggestions. He also invites neighbors and people from his synagogue to Visual Beth Midrashim during which “everybody studies the text as a community and talks with each other.”²⁹ He is asking people to “please look.... Look, wherever you are! At everything.”³⁰

He also shares his work in progress. For instance, I received images of the emerging artwork *TEKU* in December 2017 when the piece was at an early developmental stage. I barely knew what I was looking at. At the time he was experimenting with the locations of the wheel, the female figure, a photo of a teddy bear and a toy rabbit, and a shelf; the latter items disappeared in the completed artwork. The draft did not yet include a second wheel because Levy-Aldema added it only after our *havruta* conversations. He acknowledges that he drafts his pieces, saying, “I do sketches of my artworks.”³¹ During the Visual Beth Midrashim he explains with a pointer, discussing the biblical text and the artwork with his audience. Of course, the artist mostly works in his studio. How he transforms the many ideas and words spoken during the *havruta* and the Visual Beth Midrash is a big surprise to all participants every single time.

He explains that he begins reading the text alone and then discusses it with his various conversation partners.³² He probes the grammatical,

29. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 25 November 2017.

30. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 3 December 2017.

31. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 3 December 2017.

32. Currently they include Shirly Levy-Aldema, Shlomo Einstein, Allaman Allamani, and me.

linguistic, or interpretive issues of the text. Usually, the text is filled with “conceptual chaos, uncertainties, and various unexpected and unpredictable problems”³³ that make the interpretation difficult. As he thinks about the particular biblical passage, he goes about his life. The text is always on his mind as he walks, drives, or goes to sleep. He ruminates on it. Sometimes a movie stimulates his imagination, and he suddenly realizes: “Ah, this is for the artwork!”³⁴ Sometimes it is a visit to a museum, a TV advertisement, or a walk in nature. To him, the visual interpretation process is like a “chess game” between the words and the visual expression of their meanings. Interpreting the text in his mind, he designs the artwork’s “measurements, shape, color, material, daily objects, and the photograph,” as each artwork always includes a photograph. When the artwork is completed, he puts it up in his living room and continues conversing with it. He changes it as ideas for modifications come to him. He explains, “Nothing is done. It’s the process. It’s done when it’s hanging at the museum.”³⁵

The Artist

I am an artist dealing with dead things. You could say, decorative things.

I fulfill my soul with them.

Yehuda Levy-Aldema in a skype conversation on 3 December 2017

A word of disclosure: on 30 September 2015 an email informed SMU faculty about a lecture opportunity by Yehuda Levy-Aldema, who “has been working as an artist since he graduated from one of Israel’s most prestigious art schools, Jerusalem’s Bezalel Academy of Fine Arts, in 1982.” The email also explained that “his current work explores the interpenetration of biblical texts and reality through artwork that includes various objects, carvings, drawings, and photography.” I jumped at the opportunity to have my Old Testament students meet the artist, and since that day I have been in contact with him. Since March 2017, we have been doing *havrutot* via Skype almost every Sunday afternoon. I visited his studio twice in 2018 and participated in three Visual Beth Midrashim. I have not previously

33. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 3 December 2017.

34. This and the following quotes derive from the Skype conversation with the artist on 2 December 2018.

35. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 17 December 2017.

met an artist who works on the intersection of the Bible and contemporary art. Of course, many artists work on religious topics or even biblical texts, but I do not know them personally, and other artists I do know do not like to explain their art. Most important, no one would ever suspect that Levy-Aldema's artworks are about the Bible. They do not fit stereotypical notions of "biblical art." Levy-Aldema recognizes the contribution he makes when he explains:

My work is deeply philosophical, yet it provides perspective on the issues, large and small, that we confront every day. We have a definite idea that we know and understand, but all-too-often we don't adequately know, and may understand even less. That's difficult and challenging to deal with. Daily. But you have much more freedom when you can experience, and sense, the endlessness and uncertainties contained in the biblical texts. Biblical stories hold myths that frame the stories that we tell ourselves and others about our lives. When we travel and freely explore between the biblical texts and the reality of the Here and Now, we gain the capacity to understand who we are, perhaps who we are not, and who we may yet become.³⁶

His deep knowledge and understanding of the Jewish tradition combined with his love for the Bible, his eagerness to communicate with his audiences, and his artistic sensibilities, skills, and vision enable him to create remarkable visual readings of the Sodom and Gomorrah story.³⁷ Each of the many pieces merits slow looking, thinking, and understanding. Every feature in each piece holds symbolic meaning in the visual language that Levy-Aldema has been developing with purpose, precision, and commitment. His art teaches viewers to look again at the biblical text and to reconsider its meaning on the basis of a slow-reading approach. The reward is profound. Viewers learn to uncover their unconsciously held assumptions and convictions about the Bible, art, and the world and to ruminate on the possibilities of reading the

36. See his website at www.levy-aldema.com.

37. His deep knowledge of Western and Jewish art histories goes back to his curatorial work, including as the museum director and curator of the Hechal Shlomo Museum for Jewish Art in Jerusalem from 2001 to 2009. The connections between his curatorial and artistic work become clear in his discussion on the nature, purpose, and goals of one of his exhibits; see Yehuda Levy-Aldema, "Questions at the Exhibition," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54 (2011): 279–91.

Bible in the here and now. Unsurprisingly, Levy-Aldema asserts his calling as an artist who wants to educate his viewers, stating:

I am an educator, not only an artist. In my soul I am a kind of educator. Not a teacher. A wise man who has weight on his shoulders. He is not a hollow person. I hope I am not a hollow person. I am not!³⁸

Focusing on the “Beyond” of Textual and Visual Bible Readings: A Conclusion

Perhaps there is a portion of the Sodomites in each of us.
Yehuda Levy-Aldema in a Skype conversation on 30 July 2017

Levy-Aldema's art series on Sodom and Gomorrah in general and *TEKU=A Tie Outcome* in particular offer biblical scholars a wide and rich array of opportunities to interpret biblical texts in conversation with a contemporary Israeli artist who highlights the indeterminacy of biblical texts and inverts conventional, predictable, and stereotypical biblical meanings. As deconstructive artworks, the Sodom and Gomorrah series gives viewers a chance to become part of the interpretation process, as well as to reflect on the dialogical relationship between art and the Bible. Levy-Aldema's art thus combines a visual interpretive mode with the Jewish and Christian interpretation histories, Western art history, and the artist's understanding of living in the world. As such, the Sodom and Gomorrah series transforms the biblical text into memorable contemporary artworks.

Crucially, Levy-Aldema's art does *not* illustrate the text, but the artist is the skillful and insightful interpreter. Current scholarship on the intersection of art and Bible identifies this trait as indispensable in establishing the merits of art on the Bible.³⁹ The Sodom and Gomorrah series thus offers important interpretations of the biblical text. Perhaps they are what

38. In a Skype conversation with the artist on 26 November 2017.

39. See, e.g., J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu, eds., *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009); Martin O'Kane, ed., *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter*, Bible in the Modern World 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009); O'Kane, ed., *Bible, Art, Gallery*, Bible in the Modern World 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011); John Harvey, *The Bible as Visual Culture: When Text Becomes Image*, Bible in the Modern World 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013).

Nicholas Davey, a professor of philosophy at the University of Dundee, defines as “true” art. He explains:

The truth of art, religious or otherwise, does not lie in the verisimilitude of any depiction or in any verifiable correspondence between the world and how it is pictured. Its truth (in the sense of what an artwork authentically *does*) lies in its ability to turn us towards unexpected horizons of meaning along with the promise of more to be revealed from within what remains presently withheld from our understanding. In doing this the true artwork reveals the “truth” of our predicament.... [It reveals] how human understanding stands on, is nurtured and is always potentially transformable by what lies beyond it, i.e. the infinite possibilities for meaning within the horizons of language. The ability of true artwork to disrupt our understanding reveals what might even be described as the weak and perhaps sinful side of human existence, namely the tendency to become closed off to the transcendent horizons of meaning beyond us.⁴⁰

The indeterminacy of meaning is a feature not only of “true” artworks but also of the Bible, at least if we follow Greenstein. Whether textual or visual, biblical interpretation benefits from a focus on the “beyond” of meaning, as it needs to go beyond clichéd expectations and formulaic articulations. In my view, the development of a hermeneutic of the Bible in visual art holds much promise and possibility to get closer to that flickering biblical meaning that “paradoxically facilitate[s] a God-belief.”⁴¹

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40. Nicholas Davey, “Hermeneutics, Aesthetic Experience, and Religious Understanding,” in O’Kane, *Bible, Art, Gallery*, 26. For a long list of Jewish artists, see, e.g., the Schechter’s Institute’s website on “Visual Midrash” at <https://www.talivirtualmidrash.org.il/en/>.

41. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 62.

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Why Did the Serpent Choose to Address Eve Rather Than Adam (Gen 3:1)? Eve, the Serpent, and the Reader's Responsibility

Yael Shemesh

Genesis 3 is a story about choice. The serpent chooses to address the woman and entice her to eat of the forbidden fruit; the woman, and subsequently the man, choose to eat it; and readers, commentators, and scholars must choose how to interpret the story. Out of the many questions that can be asked about the story (such as, how should we understand Eve's action and what does it say about her),¹ I have chosen to restrict the discussion here to why the serpent chose to address the woman rather than the man. I first encountered this question in Professor Ed Greenstein's unforgettable course on postmodern approaches to the Bible, which he taught at Bar-Ilan University in 1999. That was also when I first encountered the concept of the "reader's responsibility," also in connection with our present question.² That course, and Ed himself, exerted a decisive influence on my

1. On the various and even contradictory ways of interpreting the story, see Yael Shemesh, "Directions in Jewish Feminist Bible Studies," *CurBR* 14 (2016): 372–406, here 393–95.

2. In his studies of biblical stories, Ed frequently brings up readers' responsibility for the interpretation they choose to attach to the text. See, e.g., Edward L. Greenstein, "Reading Strategies and the Story of Ruth," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 211–31. The question of the reader's responsibility is linked, of course, to reader-response criticism, which emerged in the United States and Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. One of those most closely identified with this school is the American literary scholar Stanley Fish, who proposed the concept of interpretive communities. See esp. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). The Hebrew translation of that book (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2012) has a foreword by Ed Greenstein (7–32) that addresses Fish's approach to interpretation. The idea that read-

academic career and my decision to pursue feminist Bible criticism. This is why I want to go more deeply into the matter here. This essay is dedicated to Ed, out of profound gratitude, great esteem, and deep friendship.

*

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1 NJPS)³

The serpent, one of God’s creatures and characterized as “shrewd,” initiates a conversation with the woman—the very first dialogue in the Bible. The story is silent about why the serpent decided to address the woman rather than the man.⁴ Many commentators and scholars ignore the ques-

ers play a part in extracting meaning from the text has become a commonplace, even if scholars assign greater importance to the text than Fish did. As observed by Tikva Frymer-Kensky (*Reading the Women of the Bible* [New York: Schocken, 2002], xxv), the values held by even those who strive for a wholly objective reading will influence the questions they bring to the biblical text. On variations on reader-response criticism, see R. M. Fowler, “Who Is ‘The Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism?” *Semeia* 31 (1985): 5–23.

3. Translations of biblical verses sometimes come from on NJPS, sometimes from RSV, as best suits my reading; where neither does so, they are my own (indicated YS). Where one of the standard sources has been modified slightly, the source siglum is followed by an asterisk. Unattributed translations of nonbiblical texts are my own.

4. As if to augment the exegetical perplexity, the serpent, in the Bible and the ancient Near East in general, symbolizes contraries, both positive and negative: life, eternal life, and fertility but also chaos and death. See Karen Randolph Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield House, 1974), esp. 97. The story of the “fiery serpents” who ravage the people, versus the brazen serpent that Moses was instructed to fashion and mount on a pole in order to save those smitten (Num 21), emphasizes the ambivalence about the creature. The serpent stands for wisdom but also for evil and rebellion against God. The Hebrew word נחש may also be related to נחוש “divination” and to sorcery. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 187; Yair Zakovitch, “Snakes, Temples, Spells, and Women” [Hebrew], *Migvan De’ot ve-hashqafot be-tarbut yisra’el* 8 (1998): 31; Eddy Zemach, “Serpent, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel” [Hebrew], *Migvan De’ot ve-hashqafot be-tarbut yisra’el* 8 (1998): 43. In various cultures, the serpent is associated with sexuality. See Avigdor Shinan, “Ḥavvah and ḥivya: On the Woman and the Serpent in the Grove of Aggadah” [Hebrew], *Migvan De’ot ve-hashqafot be-tarbut yisra’el* 8 (1998): 58–59.

tion; others pick it up and endeavor to fill in the lacuna. Some might assert that its choice was quite random and has no gender implications: it was the woman whom the serpent happened to meet first, so it spoke to her. Life is full of coincidences, after all.⁵ However, since the story does not deal with an event from our everyday lives, where one need not always search for some hidden intention and meaning, but is rather an etiological tale that, among other things, seeks to explain men's domination of women, I believe that the explanation of a chance encounter is untenable. The fact that the serpent is described as "shrewd" reinforces this, as it strongly suggests advance planning on its part. What is more, it is possible that Adam was present throughout the seduction scene, as some assert, given that we are told (3:6) that "she gave to her husband also *with her* [עִמָּה]" [YS].⁶ On the basis of these considerations, I believe there must be some significance to the serpent's decision to focus on the woman. The answers to this question provided by commentators over the generations are diverse and sometimes contradictory. Many of them denigrate the woman, while others commend her. Some are neutral and do not assign her any traits, either positive or negative, that decided the serpent to address her. All the same, as I will show below (§2.1), even an ostensibly neutral answer may have exerted a negative and far-reaching influence down through the ages with regard to perceptions of women's essential nature. In what follows I will sketch out various solutions that have been offered to fill in the gap and explain why the serpent targeted the woman rather than the man.

5. This possibility was advanced by Prof. Greenstein in that same course, in order to challenge the students to think about the subject.

6. This was the interpretation of the author and reformer Lillie Devereux Blake, a leader of the women's suffrage movement in the United States in the nineteenth century and a contributor to *The Woman's Bible*, edited by another leading suffragette, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1898; repr., New York: Prometheus Books, 1999), 26. Many have followed her in this: Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 112; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 25; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 188; Harold Bloom, *The Book of J* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 183; Rose Sallberg Kam, *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 27; Lori Forman, "Breshit," in *The Women's Torah Commentary*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000), 50–51; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "B'reishit," in *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, 2008), 15. Note that some translation traditions ignore עִמָּה here: it is reflected in the LXX, AKJV, and JPS 1917 but not in the Vulgate, RSV, and NJPS.

1. A Negative View of Women

1.1. “Because She Is Light-Headed”

The best-known answer is probably the one that denigrates not only the first woman but also her daughters throughout the generations, because Eve is perceived as the archetype of her sex. The serpent addressed her, not the man, because it identified her as the weaker link, on account of her negative character traits: naïveté, a weak intellect, frivolity, and foolishness.

A more moderate version of this idea appears in the minor tractate Avot de Rabbi Nathan: “The serpent debated with himself, saying: ‘If I go to Adam and speak to him, I know that he will not listen to me. Instead, I will go to Eve because I know that women are influenced by everyone.’”⁷

The statement that women are impressionable may not necessarily be a negative judgment, because a trusting and innocent nature may be the hallmarks of a person with a pure heart and integrity, who believes that all human beings are also like that.⁸ All the more so because this passage is immediately preceded by the midrash that Adam had “added a hedge” to the Lord’s command by telling Eve that even touching the tree was forbidden (see below, §2.3). However, Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 12) cites another biblical verse that paints women as foolish and silly:

The serpent argued with itself, saying: If I go and speak to Adam, I know that he will not listen to me, for a man is always hard (to be persuaded), as it is said, “For a man is churlish and evil in his doings” (1 Sam. 25:3); but behold I will speak to Eve, for I know that she will listen to me; for women listen to all creatures, as it is said, “She is simple and knows nothing” (Prov. 9:13).⁹

7. Recension B, chapter 1; Anthony J. Saldarini, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan (Abot de Rabbi Nathan), Version B: A Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 31–32.

8. See, e.g., how the nineteenth-century English Jewish author and poet Grace Aguilar described Eve before the sin, as she walked in the garden of Eden, “secure in her own innocence, in the consciousness of love lingering within” (Grace Aguilar, *The Women of Israel*, ed. Mayer L. Gruber [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011], 34).

9. Gerald Friedlander, trans., *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (1916; repr., New York: Hermon, 1965), 94.

The full verse in Proverbs reads: “The stupid woman bustles about; she is simple and knows nothing” (NJPS).¹⁰ Thus the midrash links Eve (as the representative of all women) with foolishness or stupidity (בְּסִילִיּוֹת)—or perhaps sexual immodesty—and explains that this is why the serpent addressed her rather than Adam (though he, too, is castigated in this midrash as harsh and devious).

Philo of Alexandria, in *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, follows the same line and attributes the serpent’s choice to address the woman rather than the man to the former’s weak mind but explains the entire story as an allegory: the serpent symbolizes pleasure (§157),¹¹ the man represents the intellect, and the woman stands for sense-perception. Pleasure is not bold enough to try to ensnare the intellect and consequently targets the senses, in the hope of swaying the intellect through them. This is why the serpent speaks to the woman rather than to the man (§165).¹² Then, “without further reflection, as the result of an unstable and unsettled conviction, she consented to the idea, ate of the fruit, and shared it with her husband” (§156).¹³

The approach found in the midrash was taken up by medieval commentators. For example, David Kimhi interprets the serpent’s choice as follows: “*to the woman*: [The serpent] did not speak to the man, because women are more readily seduced than men, inasmuch as they are light-headed.”¹⁴ Gersonides is even more caustic in his Gloss on the Words to verse 6: “But the serpent tricked the woman, because a woman’s intellect is weaker than a man’s and she is more easily seduced.”¹⁵ Then he offers

10. Again there are two different translation traditions. The RSV (following the LXX and Vulgate) evaluates her character differently: “A foolish woman is noisy; she is wanton and knows no shame.” But I think the parallelism of בְּסִילִיּוֹת and פְּתִיּוֹת militates against this sexual reading, and AKJV, JPS 1917, and NJPS agree.

11. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, ed. and trans. David T. Runia (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 89.

12. Philo, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*, 90.

13. Philo, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*, 88.

14. R. David Kimhi in Menachem Cohen, ed., *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Mikra’ot Gedolot “Haketer”* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University, 1997), 49. See b. Shabb. 33b, in another context: “Women are light-headed by nature” (the sense here is not that they are giddy or weak-minded but that they cannot withstand torture as well as men); see also b. Qidd. 80b.

15. Gersonides in Cohen, *Genesis*, 49. Similarly, the fifteenth-century Spanish commentator Abraham Saba, in his *Šeror ha-mor* (Bene Beraq: Heikhal ha-sefer, 1990), explains that the serpent approached the woman because women are more

another explanation—to supplement but not replace the first one, as we will see now.

1.2. “Because Men Are Strongly Attracted by Women’s Allures”

After Gersonides explains that the serpent selected the woman as his mark because of her weak intellect, he adds: “And after that she tempted the man, because men are strongly attracted by women’s allures.” He cites the example of Solomon’s foreign wives, who seduced him to worship alien gods. Combining the two ideas, Gersonides holds that it was the combination of women’s intellectual weakness and sexual power over men, with its potential for harm, that led the serpent to target her.¹⁶

The seventeenth-century author of the *Keli Yeḡar* commentary, Rabbi Solomon Ephraim Luntschitz, conjectures that the woman enticed the man to eat of the forbidden fruit while they were having sexual relations:

“She gave to her husband also with her: It may be that she gave it to him while he was with her intimately, because then she pressured him, as we read about Samson, ‘she pressed him’ (Judg 16:16 RSV and NJPS);¹⁷ but at another time he might not have listened to her and transgressed the Lord’s command. And this is why he said, in his self-justification, ‘the woman whom You gave to be with me’ (Gen 3:12 RSV): at a time when she was physically with me she overcame me. For this excuse makes no sense according to the plain meaning.¹⁸*

1.3 The Serpent Is the Evil Inclination or the Woman’s Inner Voice

Another approach takes the serpent to be the woman’s evil inclination. This seems to be Maimonides’s view. Drawing on Pirḡe de Rabbi Eliezer

easily dazzled than men. To this he adds, however, an even more cutting idea: the devious and scheming serpent tried its wiles on the woman because it saw her as its match in deceit (32). Saba takes her addition of the ban on touching the tree as evidence of her penchant for lying (33).

16. Gersonides in Cohen, *Genesis*, 49.

17. According to the talmudic sages, Delilah got Samson to reveal the secret of his strength by tormenting him in bed: “What is meant by ‘and pressed him’? Rabbi Isaac of the school of Rabbi Ammi said: ‘As he was about to ejaculate she detached herself from him’” (b. Sotah 9b).

18. Solomon Ephraim Luntschitz, *Keli Yeḡar al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Aguddat ḥiddushim yeḡarim, 1988), 13.

(ch. 13), he writes that “the Serpent had a rider, that it was the size of a camel, and that the rider was Sammael.”¹⁹ At various places in the *Guide* Maimonides adopts Resh Lakish’s identification of Satan (b. B. Bat. 16a): “Satan, the evil inclination, and the Angel of Death are one and the same.”²⁰ Hence there is no need to ask why the serpent spoke specifically to the woman; the voice was not that of an external creature that chose to address her for some reason rather than the man. In fact, this is an internal dialogue, and some force within her impels her to eat of the forbidden fruit. Why was it the woman’s inner voice, not the man’s? Perhaps because of the notion that women are more easily ruled by the evil inclination than men are. The comment by Rabbi Ḥanina ben Rabbi Adda (Gen. Rab. 17.6) that “as soon as she [Eve] was created, Satan was created with her” forges a direct link between Eve and Satan/the evil inclination. So does Rabbi Aḥa’s homily on the naming of Eve in Gen 3:20: “The serpent was your [Eve’s] serpent [i.e., seducer], and you are Adam’s serpent.” This evidently plays on the homophony of *ḥavvah* “Eve” and the Aramaic *ḥivya* “serpent.”²¹

In his commentary on Gen 3:1 Isaac Abravanel rejects the idea that the serpent actually carried on a conversation with the woman, given that snakes cannot talk. He also rejects the idea, which he attributes to Saadia Gaon, that Satan appeared to the woman in the guise of a serpent,²² since this is not the plain sense of Scripture. As he understands the story, the woman saw that the serpent was climbing the tree and eating its fruit but not coming to any harm. From this she inferred that the fruit was edible and tasty. This is how the serpent “spoke” to the woman: its actions led her to the conclusion that “you will not die,” and the text attributes her thoughts and logical process to the serpent, along the lines of, “You make us wise by means of the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky” (Job 35:11 YS). The implication of this reading, too, is that the serpent’s “voice”

19. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2.30 (trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 2:356).

20. See especially *Guide* 3.22 (trans. Pines, 2:489).

21. On the popular etymology that links Eve and the serpent, see, e.g., Reuven Kimelman, “The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender,” in Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 257, 258. Kimelman notes the connection between Eve and the serpent but represents the latter as an extension of the entire human race (244). He asserts that readers identify with Eve (259), a reading that I believe blurs the gender aspect of the story.

22. This description of the serpent as a tool of Satan can be found as early as Adam and Eve 16 and in Pirque R. El. 13.

was in fact the woman's inner musings. The serpent was really there, but it was a mute creature and did not conduct a dialogue with the woman.²³

To conclude this section, I should mention an idea proposed by Norman J. Cohen, Rachel Reich, and in greater detail by Yitzhak Lev-Ran, that the serpent is the woman's inner voice.²⁴ Unlike the evil impulse, her inner voice is not necessarily a negative facet of her personality and can be seen as either positive or negative.²⁵ Reich asserts that, although the serpent speaks and expresses its opinion by means of hypostasis (which turns it into a separate entity), the fact is that Eve herself is wrestling with her own thoughts and expressing her own opinion. Reich praises the courage of the woman who prefers knowledge over obedience to divine authority.²⁶ Lev-Ran holds that the serpent is absent from the "trial scene" because it is not separate from the woman but represents her inner voice; thus the opportunity given the woman to defend herself is also the serpent's hearing.²⁷

2. A Neutral Interpretation

2.1. The Sexual Motif: "It Conceived a Passion for Her"

One explanation offered by the Jewish exegesis of our story for why the serpent addressed the woman rather than the man is that it lusted for her. This idea is stated in Gen. Rab. 18.6: "When [the serpent] saw them having

23. Isaac Abravanel, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis* [Hebrew], ed. Yehuda Shaviv (Jerusalem: Chovev, 2007), 177–79.

24. Norman J. Cohen, *Voices from Genesis* (Woodstock, NY: Jewish Lights, 1998), 27; Rachel Reich, "*The Woman Whom Thou Gavest to be with Me*" [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2005), 21; Yitzhak Lev-Ran, "Narrative Modes for Presenting Complexity of Inner Life of Biblical Characters" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2009), 148–154.

25. In contrast to the view that the serpent stands for the woman's inner voice, some view it as a form of seduction by the deity, who wants Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, gain knowledge, and redeem God from His loneliness. See Francis Landy, "Two Versions of Paradise," in *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 183–265, here 188–89; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 30, 34–35. As the latter put it: "Just as God claims that it is not good for the human to be alone, neither is it good for God to be alone; and God will always be alone if there is no one to share some part of his experience" (35).

26. Reich, *Woman Whom Thou Gavest*, 21.

27. Lev-Ran, "Narrative Modes," 154.

intercourse it conceived a passion for her.”²⁸ Rashi on Gen 3:1 echoes this: “It saw them naked and engaging in intercourse and conceived a passion for her.” That is, Rashi (building on Genesis Rabbah) explicitly links the serpent’s approach to the woman to the end of chapter 2, “The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame” (Gen 2:25 NJPS). Note also the play on words, ערומים “naked” and ערום “shrewd.”²⁹ The Tosefta (t. Sotah 4:17) offers a similar explanation: “The serpent wanted to kill Adam and marry Eve.”³⁰ That is, the serpent expected that Eve would give Adam a piece of the forbidden fruit before she tasted it herself, and after Adam succumbed the serpent would intervene to keep her from eating it as well and inherit the widow.³¹

28. Evidently on account of its shape, inter alia, the serpent is perceived as a phallic symbol. See, e.g., Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1976), 189; S. Giora Shoham, *Love as Bait: Eve, Casanova and Don Juan* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ramot, 1982), 95–96. With relation to the story in Gen 3, see Lyn M. Bechtel, “Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2.4B–3.24,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 90; Lori Hope Lefkovitz, *In Scripture: The First Stories of Jewish Sexual Identities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 6, 21–22. The Talmud (b. Shabb. 110a) offers a number of suggestions for a woman who sees a snake and is afraid that it wishes to have sex with her. She should remove her clothes and throw them at it: if it winds itself around them, it desires her. In order to protect herself against it she can engage in intercourse with her husband while it watches, which will make her loathsome in its eyes. But some say that this will only increase its lust and recommend that she throw clippings of her hair and fingernails at it and say, “I am impure, I am impure.”

29. See Everett Fox, *Genesis and Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1983), 21. Fox rightly notes the link that the play on words creates between the end of chapter 2 and the start of chapter 3.

30. Saul Lieberman, ed., *The Tosefta* [Hebrew], 2nd ed. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1995), 176.

31. It is interesting that this is inverted by John Milton in *Paradise Lost* (9.896–916), where Adam eats because Eve has already done so and he does not want to continue living without her! I would like to thank Lenn Schramm for bringing this anti-parallel to my attention. In Milton’s epic, Adam symbolizes the loving husband who makes a conscious and noble decision that his life will be pointless without his partner. Note, however, that this romantic approach and the close relationship between the first two humans does not exactly emerge from the accusatory finger that Adam points at Eve in the biblical account (Gen 3:12). It also stands as a negative parallel to Rashi’s commentary on that verse: that Eve gave the fruit to Adam to avoid the possibility that after her death he would find another wife.

The idea that the serpent enticed Eve to eat the fruit as a way to seduce her in no way casts aspersions on her character or that of women in general; it is not their fault that the serpent lusts for Eve. But various texts that adopt this approach add devastating consequences of the serpent's passion for the woman: the serpent had intercourse with her and spewed her full of his pollution, after which all women are contaminated. The Talmud follows this line: "When the serpent copulated with Eve, it injected her with pollution" (b. Shabb. 145b–146a; the same statement is attributed to Rabbi Johanan in b. Yebam. 103b and b. Avod. Zar. 102b). According to Pirque R. El. 21, Cain, who murdered Abel, was born of the serpent's spawn. In other words, as a result of the serpent's intercourse with Eve, death entered the world, including in the sense that the first murderer was the fruit of that coupling.

The collateral damage to all women wreaked by the idea that the serpent polluted Eve is evident, for example, in the commentary of Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad (nineteenth century), known as the Ben Ish Hai. In his *Ben Yehoyada* on b. B. Metz. 84b, he explains why the birth of sons is accounted a blessing, while the birth of daughters is not. He tells the story of an educated woman who was asked by her son, a rabbinic scholar, why she was happy when one of their neighbors was delivered of a son but sad when the infant was a girl. "Even if a female is lesser and inferior, it isn't appropriate for you to find her loathsome, because you too are female. How can you loath and hate a creature like yourself? I am astounded." His mother reminded him of the workers who had come to clean the latrine in their courtyard, which had started to overflow. In the middle of the job, when the men sat down to eat in their clothes, covered with excrement, one asked to sit next to his partner, but the man refused: his own stench was enough for him, and he did not want to add his friend's stench to it.

So do not be astonished, my son, that I am female and loath females, for a woman's stench is harsh and bitter on account of the impure menstrual blood she sees. ... That is why I, being a woman, am loathsome in my own eyes. What can I do about it? That is how I was created. But myself and the females already born and who have grown into women should suffice for the world. Why should more be added to them? So when I see that a girl has been born and come into the world, a woman who will increase the impurity and filth in the world, I am sad and see her as loathsome.

Drawing on Rabbi Hayyim Vital and Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, the Ben Ish Hai goes on to explain that menstrual impurity was caused by Eve's sin and the pollution that the serpent injected into her. Adam's sin was less severe than Eve's, so his contamination is concealed and limited to his foreskin. Circumcision cleanses males of their pollution, but there is no remedy for women, who are "a vessel waiting for the contaminated filth of the Evil One; that is why all are sad that another vessel to increase the filth has been created."³²

This negative attitude toward menstrual blood is quite different from the view of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor-Shor, in his commentary on Gen 17:11, that the precept of circumcision given to males is paralleled by women's meticulous observance of the precept of family purity by avoiding sexual relations with their husband when they are menstruating: "And the blood of menstruation that women observe by telling their husbands of the onset of their periods—this for them is covenantal blood."³³

2.2. The Serpent Was Disappointed That Adam Did Not Choose It for His Helpmate and Sought to Kill the Woman in Revenge

Inverting the Tosefta's explanation (cited above) that the serpent wanted to eliminate Adam and marry Eve, modern scholars have proposed that the serpent wanted to kill Eve in order to avenge the slight that Adam had chosen her, rather than it, to be his helpmate. The account of the creation of the animals in Gen 2 implies that the original intention was that one of them would fill this role (vv. 18–19). It was only after the man was not satisfied with any of them (v. 20) that woman was created to be his companion (vv. 21–24). The idea is that the serpent, being the most intel-

32. Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad (Ben Ish Hai), *Ben Yehoyada: Glosses and Explanations of Aggadot ... in the Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Yeshu'ah ben David Salim [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Salim, 1998), 3:260–61. He quotes the concluding passage from Rabbi Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, *Sefer Petaḥ einayim* 2, on b. Niddah 31b (1790; repr., Jerusalem: Hatehiya, 1959), 159b–160a, here 160a.

33. Rabbi Joseph Bekhor-Shor in Cohen, *Genesis*, 155. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 196–97. As Cohen observes (197), whereas the rabbis took a negative view of menstruation, Bekhor-Shor inverts it (more precisely, the observance of the precept of family purity associated with it) to the women's positive action to affirm the divine covenant. I would like to thank the anonymous reader of this essay who called my attention to this fascinating source.

lignant of all the animals and even endowed with the capacity of speech, saw itself as the natural candidate for the position. Angry that it was rejected, it caused the woman to sin and lead the man into sin, in order to prove to Adam that his choice had been fatally mistaken.³⁴

2.3. Eve Did Not Hear the Prohibition from God's Mouth

Another explanation for the serpent's choice, one that does not task Eve with a negative character—and does not assert that her daughters developed destructive qualities as a result of the incident—is that Eve was the weak link because she had not heard the divine prohibition herself but only as reported to her by Adam. Thus *Keli Yeqar* on Gen 3:1, which explains the discrepancy between the prohibition as stated to Adam, which bans only eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and Eve's reply to the serpent that she was not even allowed to touch it. The woman had not heard the injunction directly from God but only from Adam, and he, out of caution, had added the hedge of physical contact. Because Eve thought that this restriction, too, was of divine origin, it was easy for the serpent to mislead her: it pushed her against the tree, and she found that she was unharmed.³⁵ In other words, it was Adam, by extending the prohibition, who was guilty that the serpent was able to lead Eve astray.³⁶ This explanation (without the midrashic addition that the serpent pushed Eve into the tree) has found support among modern commentators as well. Sarna, for example, posits that the serpent addressed Eve rather

34. Robert Sacks, "The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 1–10)," *Int* 8.2–3 (1980): 57; Gad Eldad, *Man—Between Creature and Creator* [Hebrew] (Alon Shvut: Herzog College, 2010), 18; Yoshiyahu Fargeon, "‘Why, O Lord, Do You Lead Us Astray?’: God's Involvement in Lying and Deception in the Biblical Narrative" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2014), 69 n. 294.

35. Luntschitz, *Keli Yeqar*, 13. This is the usual explanation in traditional Jewish exegesis. See also Rashi on Gen 3:5. Others suggest that it was the serpent that touched the tree in order to demonstrate to Eve that doing so was not fatal. See, e.g., Midrash Aggadah, ed. Buber, Gen 3, §3.

36. See also Ellen Frankel, *The Five Books of Miriam: A Woman's Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 7. In this midrashic work, Frankel asks why the serpent addressed the woman and not the man and in the name of "our daughters," "our mothers" provides the same answer as the *Keli Yeqar*, including the point that Adam added the prohibition against even touching the tree.

than Adam because she was more vulnerable, inasmuch as she had not received the divine command directly.³⁷

3. Positive Interpretations

I have found little direct attention by modern feminist commentators to the question of why the serpent spoke to the women rather than to the man. They do, however, deal extensively with how Eve is portrayed in the account of the sin.

Naturally enough, a positive take on Eve's character in the context of the serpent's decision to approach her can be found chiefly among the mediating feminist critics who endeavor to meld their modern feminist ideology with the ancient biblical text.³⁸ But it can already be found in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the prominent nineteenth-century American suffragette and the editor of what was deemed scandalous when published, *The Woman's Bible*. Stanton, who was not shy about expressing fierce criticism of the Bible in other places and in general cannot be affiliated with mediating feminist scholarship, assumed that the serpent was aware of Eve's "dignity and lofty ambition" when it addressed her and seduced her with the prospect of knowledge.³⁹ Phyllis Tribble, too, praises the woman for her stellar qualities, as reflected in her reply to the serpent: "The response of the woman to the serpent reveals her as intelligent, informed, and perceptive. Theologian, ethicist, hermeneut, rabbi, she speaks with clarity and authority."⁴⁰

Neither Stanton nor Tribble asks why the serpent spoke to the woman, rather than the man, but their readings suggest a number of answers to our question. By contrast, Rose Sallberg Kam does wonder about it and offers two answers: perhaps the serpent approached the woman because she was more attractive than the man or because she posed a greater challenge because of her questing intelligence.⁴¹

37. Sarna, *Genesis*, 24. See also Y. Moshe Emanueli, *The Book of Genesis: Explanations and Elucidations* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Biblical Research Society, 1978), 82.

38. On "mediating feminist scholarship" as opposed to "militant feminist scholarship," see Shemesh, "Directions," 375–87, 393–98.

39. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Book of Genesis—Chapter III," in Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, 23.

40. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 110.

41. Kam, *Their Stories, Our Stories*, 27.

The Israeli poet Sh. Shifra (the pen name of Shifra Shifman Shmuelevitz) maintained that the narrative choice of Eve⁴² as the person who chose to eat of the forbidden fruit is important for the story's internal logic: "Eve, the mother of all living things, in that she grants life, is also the tomb. She is the cradle of a human being's birth but also his deathbed."⁴³ She sees Eve as a symbol of the rebel (in the sense of Camus) and as the first to exercise the freedom to choose and shape the human essence as such.⁴⁴

It is not a weak mind, but first and foremost the courage and desire to know herself, that endow her with the power to attach a question mark to the divine threat 'you will surely die' and to defy God's word. And perhaps, even more than this, she accepts *ab initio* the decree of finitude in order to gain 'knowledge of good and evil.' The Garden of Eden as an eternal and unchanging experience does not suit Eve's female essence, so she sets up her will against the divine will."⁴⁵

How different is this argument from those that blame the woman's weak intelligence!

Carol Meyers, too, emphasizes Eve's positive attributes as she is depicted in Gen 3. She is the first person to "utter language," the characteristic trait of human existence. Her dialogue with the serpent, the shrewdest of all the animals (who, at the start of the scene, has not yet been cursed), is evidence of her own intellect.⁴⁶ Tamara Eskenazi, in her comment on Gen 3:3, stresses that the woman was the first human to engage in dialogue

42. It should be noted, however, that she is referring to the choice of the story that the serpent addresses Eve and not to the choice of the serpent as a literary character that weighs the odds of a successful approach on the basis of the humans' traits.

43. Sh. Shifra, "Eve, the Rebellious Woman: The Garden of Eden Stories in the Genesis and in Myths of the Ancient Near East" [Hebrew], in *Women Reading Genesis*, ed. Ruth Ravitzky (Tel Aviv: Yedioth, 1999), 56.

44. Sh. Shifra, "Eve, the Rebellious Woman," 57. Sh. Shifra shows this throughout the essay, comparing the rebellion in Genesis with Gilgamesh and the myth of Adapa and the South Wind (where it is in fact Adapa's obedience to the patron deity that prevents him from receiving eternal life).

45. Sh. Shifra, "Eve, the Rebellious Woman," 67. Cf. Forman ("Breshit," 51–52), who asserts that, were it not for Eve's boldness, human history as we know it would not have existed and that, in order to life to continue to be created, Eve had to listen to her own conscience.

46. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91–92.

and adds that the woman, unlike the man, actually evokes God in what she says.⁴⁷

Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn also praise the woman and see parallels between her and the deity:

The woman reaches for sustenance, beauty, and wisdom. And for doing so she is blamed, both within the text and by countless generations of biblical interpreters in the text's afterlife. ... Yet like God, the woman is an explorer. She seeks the good, fruit that is good for food. She delights in beauty (God took care to create trees that were beautiful) and the fruit is a delight to the eyes.⁴⁸

Like God, she has an adventurous spirit and is bold enough to take risks.⁴⁹

Tikva Frymer-Kensky makes the point that the serpent persuaded the woman that by eating the forbidden fruit she would become godlike and that "it is this thirst for knowledge and for divinity that makes her listen."⁵⁰

In light of all these positive assessments of Eve, I would like to propose that the serpent addressed the woman rather than the man because he knew that she was a better communicator (in fact, this is a classic gender difference between men and women throughout history) and also perhaps because she was bolder and willing to take risks in order to gain what the serpent offered her and what she seems to have so ardently desired: knowledge.⁵¹

Conclusion

I have not really provided a categorical answer to the question of why the serpent addressed Eve rather than Adam—for no unambiguous answer can be given on the basis of the information provided in the text and its silence about this issue. My main goal has been to point out the various answers that have been offered to fill in this lacuna, the power of choice granted readers for doing so, and the responsibility readers must accept

47. Eskenazi, "B'reishit," 14.

48. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise*, 30.

49. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise*, 31.

50. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 209.

51. This was my suggestion for filling the gap in the course by Prof. Greenstein mentioned at the start of this article.

when they come to interpret the story, which may be no less than Adam and Eve's responsibility when they decided to taste the forbidden fruit, for readers over the generations have shaped and created, through their interpretations, the attitude toward the first woman and to all women since.

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Biblical Interpretation as Mind Reading: Aviva Zornberg and the Problem of Other Minds

Steven Weitzman

This essay is my way of expressing appreciation for Ed Greenstein's many contributions as a literary scholar and teacher. Its focus is another contemporary scholar whose approach to the Bible also combines literary sensitivity and engagement in Jewish tradition, but its inspiration is Ed's commitment to hermeneutical self-awareness and pluralism. As he notes in one of his essays, "the Torah as she is read by contemporary critical eyes can mean on different levels simultaneously."¹ This essay is inspired by that observation, although the particular reading of the Torah it focuses on moves beyond what "critical eyes" can see.

Over the last thirty years, the Jerusalem-based Torah scholar Aviva Zornberg has perfected a distinctive form of biblical interpretation through public lectures that have in turn led to essayistic commentaries that include *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus*, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*, and other successful publications.² While she has won many fans, academic biblical scholars—I mean the sort that engage in source criticism, text criticism, and other forms of critical scholarship—have not been as receptive, generating few reviews of her books and only rarely engaging her approach.³ For

1. Edward L. Greenstein, "The Torah as She is Read," *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, BJS 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 52.

2. Aviva Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001); Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflection on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009).

3. Some exceptions to this neglect are reviews of Zornberg's work by the likes of Daniel Boyarin in a review of *The Beginning of Desire* published in *Tikkun* 11 (March

her part, Zornberg does not engage academic biblical scholarship either: outside of a few references to literary-minded scholars such as Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg, she does not express interest in academic biblical scholarship or draw from it. I find the lack of mutual engagement unfortunate, especially as someone who shares Ed Greenstein's openness to interpretive diversity, and would like to use this essay to try to lessen, if not close, the divide.

One possible obstacle for critical biblical scholars is the fact that Zornberg's interpretations come across as religious: a midrash-like reading of the Torah grounded in the embrace of its revelatory character. This begs the question of what she means by revelation, which I will touch on below, but for now I would only note that dismissal on these grounds is unwarranted. It is true that Zornberg speaks sincerely about God, inspiration and redemption, but having now read a good portion of her work from the perspective of a secular scholar, I have yet to find in it any claim about the text or, as far-fetched as this may sound, even about God that cannot be justified from within a secularized intellectual tradition, be that psychoanalysis, phenomenology, pragmatism, or postmodernism, and her interpretive moves, while certainly steeped in midrash, have parallels in the playful overreading practiced by contemporary thinkers such as Stanley Cavell and Slavoj Žižek in response to nonreligious texts.⁴ Zornberg writes from within a particular religious tradition that she embraces as a response to the ambiguities, destructive impulses, and pain that come with being human, but the insights she draws from the biblical text do not require commitment to Orthodoxy or to any religious creed—she does not grant religion a privileged position on the truth—and it is possible to appreciate her work from both within and beyond a religious perspective.

A more difficult-to-bridge difference between Zornberg and critical biblical scholarship is that they are not really reading the same text, notwithstanding the fact they appear to be reading the same biblical books. In the introduction to her first work, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, Zornberg explains that the true focus of her interpretive efforts is not the Bible

1996): 72; and Tikvah Frymer-Kensky in a review of the same work in *JR* (1996): 611–12. For a recent scholarly treatment of her approach, see now James Redfield, "Behind Auerbach's 'Background': Five Ways to Read What Biblical Narratives Don't Say," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 39 (2015): 121–50.

4. Cf. Colin David, *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek and Cavell* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

as an object in the world—the focus of critical biblical scholarship—but the Torah as an extension of the reader's mind or imagination: “the Torah text that is so plainly ‘there’ can be approached only by the strenuous and imaginative ‘making’ of the reader.”⁵ The Torah that Zornberg is interpreting, one might say, is the Self reflected back to itself in an alienated form, which is why psychoanalysis is so important to her approach. By drawing meaning from cryptic and puzzling details in the biblical text, what she is in fact doing is exploring hidden dimensions of the human mind as mirrored back by the text.

My focus here is how Zornberg addresses one of the great puzzles of human subjectivity: the problem of other minds. I do not use this phrase in the solipsistic philosophical sense of how one knows that that other people have minds like our own; I have in mind an ethical problem rather than an epistemological one and one that manifests itself in everyday life: How is it possible to know what is going on inside another mind, to penetrate into a consciousness of an other, and to think about, experience, or feel the world from that person's point of view? In the psychoanalytic tradition on which Zornberg draws, the self is unknown to itself, and it takes considerable effort to uncover what is concealed within it. Another's mind is all the less accessible than one's own; not only is it also inherently mysterious in its operations, but added to that is the fact that it can actively misrepresent or conceal itself, which is why, in our interactions with other people we so often go wrong, overtrusting some, being overly suspicious of others. This is what I am referring to as the problem of other minds, and it is a tough one to solve; we manage to infer or guess other people's unexpressed mental states on a daily basis—an ability that psychologists refer to as “everyday mindreading” to convey its commonplaceness as a skill that most people develop as children but also its magic-like operation, the fact that the cognitive processes involved go beyond what reason and the senses allow.⁶

Zornberg's efforts to probe the mysteries of the mind include attention to the puzzles of everyday mind reading. Although she may not be familiar with that specific concept and the research it has inspired, it is more or less what she is referring to in *The Murmuring Deep* when she notes “communication that takes place between human beings [that] is

5. Aviva Zornberg, *Genesis*, xv.

6. See William Ickes, *Everyday Mind Reading: Understanding What Other People Think and Feel* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 2003).

never exhausted by what is consciously and explicitly communicated.”⁷ She acknowledges that humans have ways to penetrate the consciousness of others, and there, and in her other works, she uses biblical interpretation to explore what connects minds and what divides them: what makes it difficult for one mind to be known to another, how it is possible to overcome the communicative barriers between minds, and what it takes to reach into the consciousness of others, to see the world as they do. Her approach to these problems draws heavily on psychoanalysis as a way into other minds, but as we will see presently she recognizes that its ability to see into other minds has certain limits, and in the end she suggests another way into other people’s minds.

In this essay I sample Zornberg’s thinking on the challenges of everyday mind reading by looking at the interpretation of the Joseph story she presents in *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, in a chapter devoted to the Torah portion *Va-yiggash* (Gen 44:18–47:27) entitled “The Pit and the Rope.”⁸ I have chosen this story as a focus because the problem of how to overcome the distance between minds is at its center. In the narrative that precedes *Va-yiggash*, Joseph’s brothers have come before him in Egypt to seek his help without realizing that the official they are petitioning is the brother they cast into a pit years before, but Joseph recognizes them and seizes on the encounter to conduct a test of their probity. The title *Va-yiggash* comes from the first word of the portion Zornberg is considering in this chapter, “And he came up,” which refers to Judah’s drawing near to Joseph in order to plead with him to spare their brother Benjamin, but the entire portion is about people drawing nearer to each other: Joseph’s reunification with his brothers and his return to his father. Zornberg’s focus is on how this breakthrough became possible, and in her effort to address this question she transforms *Va-yiggash* into a lesson on how to solve the problem of other minds.

Joseph and the Psychoanalytic Approach to Other Minds

I must leave it to readers to recall the particulars of Joseph story and to read Zornberg’s impossible-to-paraphrase interpretation of it in *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* for themselves; I will use this essay to

7. Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, ix.

8. Zornberg, *Genesis*, 314–51.

follow one of the threads of her interpretation. The two figures at the center of her reading are Joseph and Judah. As is true of all the biblical figures who appear in her commentaries, they signify particular modalities of thought, and what sets them into motion in this chapter is what Zornberg describes as the problem of *emunah*, or trust, the problem of how to know if what another is saying is true. None of the figures in the Joseph story begins with that kind of knowledge about the others: Joseph does not trust his brothers, nor do they trust him. They only have each other's word, and, as Zornberg notes, words are unreliable, used to deceive, mislead, and obscure the truth about oneself. Language is the most direct way into other minds, but it can also be a barrier, revealing other minds only partially and sometimes masking their thoughts and intentions. Joseph and Judah in Zornberg's retelling of their encounter function as allegorical figures for the mind as it seeks to overcome this gap between itself and other minds, each representing a particular approach to the problem.

In Zornberg's characterization, Joseph approaches this problem from a scientist-like, empiricist perspective. He does not trust what his eyes cannot see and thus seeks to measure the truthfulness of his brothers' words against an objectively observable reality. Zornberg's portrait of Joseph goes well beyond the Bible's characterization of him, but there is a hint of this response in Gen 42, where Joseph devises a test to see if his brothers have been telling him the truth:

He said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies." But Joseph said to them. "it is just as I have said to you; you are spies! Here is how you will be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your brother (Benjamin) comes here. Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you.... Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die. (Gen 42:9–20, my trans.)

Joseph knows from his own prior experience that people cannot be judged by outward appearance; he has plenty of reason to be skeptical of his brothers given their treacherous treatment of him in the past, and he is now concealing the truth about himself in this very encounter with them. Out of that background grows a need for a clarity, certitude, and

verification that Zornberg refers to as “the demand for ocular proof,” a need to get to the bottom of who his brothers really are.

Zornberg explicitly describes Joseph as a scientist applying an experimental approach to human relationships.

Joseph as master knower, with the eyes in his head to examine and organize the apparent formlessness of the word, uses the vocabulary of investigation. His aim is clarity, evidence; what he sees he will believe. The basis of his experimental approach is the fact that people are not transparent: one cannot master them at a glance, or verify that their words correspond to reality. Therefore, Joseph’s strategy is to set them to act in ways that will test the credibility of their words. (*Genesis*, 342)

Joseph’s goal in his interaction with his brothers is a high-resolution, absolutely reliable picture of reality that he can know is indubitably true—and he pursues it in the way that a scientist would, by undertaking an experiment designed to elicit the truth in the form of visual evidence. Joseph’s test of his brothers, an elaborate ruse designed to determine whether his brothers have changed in the decades since they cast him into a pit, is like applying a microscope to them in order to amplify his perception, to see what would otherwise be invisible.

It turns out, in fact, that Joseph is not only scientific-like in his approach to other minds but, more specifically, a kind of *psychoanalyst*, a description that leaps out because of the role of psychoanalysis in Zornberg’s own interpretive project:

Joseph engages in a kind of psychoanalysis of his brothers; he asks questions that led them to a knowledge beyond any they could have achieved on their own. This is Joseph as inspired therapist, uncovering ... buried truths. (*Genesis*, 342)

The knowledge that Joseph attains in this way strikes his brothers as uncanny—he is able to see things that they themselves cannot see—but there is nothing supernatural about it: his power to see is attained not through “clairvoyancy” but through the “intellectual discipline” of psychoanalytic interrogation.

Zornberg’s portrait of Joseph, the language of psychoanalysis suggest, is in part a reflection on the very intellectual discipline to which she so often turns for insight into the mind. The mind that she finds reflected in the Torah’s narrative is the unconscious mind, the “unthought known,”

as she refers to it elsewhere (*Murmuring Deep*, xvii), in which we know things about ourselves and others in ways that are not registered by conscious thought, and her work draws for insight on Freud, Jacques Lacan, Donald Winnicott, Jean Laplanche, Julia Kristeva, Christopher Bollas, Adam Phillips, and others in the psychoanalytic tradition. Here, however, she seems to acknowledge a problem with psychoanalysis as a way of knowing other humans. Joseph's psychoanalytic approach to his brothers is divination-like in its power to uncover their secrets, yet Zornberg recognizes something radically wrong (*Genesis*, 343) about its compulsion to search out the secrets of others.

Part of what undermines Joseph's psychoanalytic project is that he himself does not understand what fully motivates it. Zornberg has learned from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* that the processes of observation, discovery, and analysis are interwoven with power, and she detects in Joseph's psychoanalytic project a will to power, a desire to gain a superior position over his brothers, to manipulate and control them. Joseph seeks to know their secrets, but they are not allowed to learn his, and the knowledge he acquires only further imbalances their power relationship by investing him with a mystique that reinforces their sense of his superiority. Because it is an assertion of power, moreover, Joseph's investigation provokes resistance, not in a psychoanalytic sense but in a political one: Judah in particular does not want to be known in this way and refuses to go along.

Beyond the sinisterly panoptic dimension of Joseph's project, there is another problem with it as well: people are just too complicated to be known in this way. As much as he is able to learn about his brothers, Joseph does not fully understand even his own motivations—where in his background his compulsive need for clarity comes from or how it is entangled with power and self-interest—and that lack of self-understanding restricts his understanding of others. In their effort to know each other, Zornberg suggests, people have to settle for a “less crystalline, conclusive type of perception,” not absolute clarity but a plausible approximation (*Genesis*, 342–47). Joseph learns to embrace this less-certain kind of knowledge but only after his encounter with Judah compels him to change course and give up on his experiment. To the extent that she has been referring to psychoanalysis, Zornberg seems to be suggesting that—notwithstanding all that she herself has learned from it—it is not adequate as a solution to the problem of other minds and can even hinder full-fledged human connection.

Judah: An Ironic Approach to Other Minds

Zornberg's retelling of the story puts Joseph in opposition to Judah, who signifies another response to the problem of other minds. Judah is the pivotal figure in the story as Zornberg reads it. His speech in Gen 44:18–34, a plea to Joseph to release Benjamin for the sake of their father Jacob, has a profound impact on Joseph, compelling him to abandon psychoanalytic experiment, but how it achieves this result is not apparent at first. While the speech is the main focus of the chapter, its content, its particular words, do not draw much comment from Zornberg: it adds no new information and does not exactly make an argument, simply appealing to Joseph's compassion. But that is to focus on the surface of the text; the subtext is a different story. With help from midrashic sources, Zornberg detects between the lines of Judah's speech a mind deepened by pain, responsibility, and empathy, a mind that as a result of its particular experiences and relationships is now capable of comprehending people in a way that Joseph cannot. It is from those same midrashic sources that she constructs an understanding of how the speech itself functions as a way to reach other minds.

Whereas Joseph fails in his psychoanalytic project, Judah knows how to draw out what is hidden in his brother—an ability that Zornberg describes with help from a midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* that uses a metaphor of the rope to describe Judah's ability to reach into the hidden thoughts of Joseph:

“Then Judah went up to him” (Gen 44:18, the opening words of *Vayiggash*). “The designs in a man's mind are deep waters, but a man of understanding can draw them out” (Prov 20:5). “The designs in a man's mind” refers to Joseph. But as much as Joseph was wise, Judah came and defeated him, as is said, “Then Judah went up.” What does this resemble? A deep pit into which no one could climb down. Then a clever person came and brought a long rope that reached down into the water so he could draw from it. So was Joseph deep, and Judah came to draw from him. (Gen. Rab. 93.3)

The parable calls to mind Joseph's own experience in a pit, but in this context Joseph is himself the pit, a well filled with water too far down to reach. Judah knows how to reach it, however, throwing a long rope into the pit to draw some of it out. In another version of the midrash in *Tanhuma*, Judah makes the rope himself, knowing how to “tie rope to rope, cord to cord, twine to twine” (*Tanhuma Yashan* 2). “The image of the rope evokes

distance and connection,” Zornberg explains. The distance is the space between humans, the opacity that makes one person so inaccessible to another, but the rope image also suggests the possibility of spanning that distance, and Judah knows how to do so: “he engineers techniques to draw out what is most private into the public area” (*Genesis*, 323). That Zornberg has in mind here Judah’s speech is made clear a few pages later when she describes the process of composing the speech as attaching “rope to rope,” a stringing together of words in a way that allows Judah to extend into the pit of Joseph’s mind (*Genesis*, 330).

If Zornberg is not referring here to psychoanalysis and its ability to penetrate the secrets of other minds, what method is she describing? The parable of the rope suggests that the speech works not by detecting something hidden within Joseph but by drawing something out of him, something that Joseph himself did not know was there, but how does it do that, and what does it draw out? The speech’s central message seems simple enough, but it involves a certain rhetorical move that it will help to unpack. Zornberg summarizes its central message as follows:

What [Judah] says, quite simply, is this: “I have seen my father’s anguish at the loss of Joseph—I have heard him describe an absence (‘I have not seen him since’). My eyes have learned to cross his line of sight, to see that absence too. And if I should have to see another such absence, I should not be able to bear the sight.” (*Genesis*, 330)

What Zornberg highlights about the speech is the way it aligns Judah’s perspective with that of his father Jacob. He is not simply expressing sympathy for Judah; *he claims to be able to see through the eyes of his father*. Psychologists describe the cognition involved as perspective-taking, the act of perceiving a situation from the point of view of another; while that sounds like empathy, and there is overlap, it is considered a distinct cognitive skill that involves not just an ability to intuit or conceive what another person thinks but to understand experience as the other person perceives or feels it. That is what Judah shows himself able to do here. Couched in what Zornberg describes as a “vocabulary of intimate relationship,” the speech conveys his ability not just to acknowledge the loss that Jacob has suffered but to see that loss as his father sees it: “My eyes have learned to cross his line of sight.”

But Judah’s hard-won ability to see the world as his father sees it is not what makes his speech work as “a rope,” as a way of reaching into the

mind of another such as Joseph; there is something deeper going on in Zornberg's reading of it that we can grasp only by understanding what it is drawing from another stream of thought important to Zornberg's thinking: pragmatism as developed by the American philosopher Richard Rorty and especially his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Zornberg refers to this work explicitly in the chapter (e.g., *Genesis*, 338), and there are echoes or references to it throughout, but these occur without much explanation or elaboration, and it will therefore help to understand what she makes of Judah's speech to note what Rorty argues there.⁹

The starting point of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, and a key tenet of pragmatism in general, is that truth is made, not found. That is, truth is not an inherent quality of the world, a thing that exists out there that preexists how we think about the world, but is produced through language, by how we describe and communicate about the world. People might think their description of what is true is merely a transcription of how things actually are—in Rorty's words, a "final vocabulary" immune to being displaced by another way of describing reality because it is correctly reflecting how the world is—but Rorty observes that no final vocabulary has ever proven final. Sooner or later, they are all displaced by other descriptions, and it is nonsense to speak as if one description is the final and most definitive one, registering a privileged view of reality that cannot be supplanted. Because our descriptions of reality are conditioned by the particular circumstances in which we are communicating at the time, the concepts produced by those descriptions—Truth, Nature, the Self, and so on—will always be contingent as well and always, therefore, capable of being revised or eclipsed by other descriptions. Rorty has a name for those who recognize that the final vocabularies they are using are not final, calling them "ironists," and they are heroes in the story he tells.

According to Zornberg, Joseph is no ironist (*Genesis*, 338). He, too, is skeptical of final vocabularies, but that is precisely why he wants to go outside of language altogether, to seek the kind of certitude that only visible proof can offer. There is a truth to be discovered about his brothers, he believes, and he aims to uncover it by finding ocular proof from the world beyond what his brothers claim about themselves. But according to

9. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Rorty, there is no vantage point outside of language from which to judge the truth, no privileged position that will give one direct access to a world outside of its description in particular circumstances—no objective truth out there and no objective truth in here either, no reality to selfhood or to the mind to be discovered behind their articulation in language. This is the thinking Judah personifies as Zornberg imagines him: by the time of his meeting with Joseph, he has grown into a Rortian ironist. If he can apprehend truths he did not recognize earlier in his life—if he can now see the world as his father sees it—these are not objective, verifiable truths of the sort that Joseph sought out, truths to be pursued by ferreting out evidence or by amplifying one's power of vision. Judah has found a way into the minds of others not by transcending language but by recognizing that the truth only exists within and as constituted through words.

The Rortean approach to truth—including the truth of the Self—as something constituted through language is part of what we need to understand to appreciate how Judah's speech works as a way of bridging the space between minds, but another important concept in this regard is Rorty's notion of "redescription." Rorty devotes a good number of pages in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* to discussing the philosopher Nietzsche and the novelist Proust, and the reason is that they were ironists who realized that, to break free of the final vocabularies that others were seeking to impose on them, they would have to redescribe things, come up with another description of reality. Thus Nietzsche sought to liberate humanity from the moral and religious description imposed on the world by Christianity and philosophy by attempting to redescribe God and the categories of good and evil. At a more personal level, Proust sought to change his own life, to create himself anew, by endeavoring to redescribe those describing him. If the truth is constituted through language, it follows that new vocabularies, new ways of describing reality, generate new truths: new metaphysics, new ethics, new selves.

This is what Judah is doing in his speech, according to Zornberg. Her reading of it is in fact a redescription of its own that transforms the speech into a particular kind of Rortean redescription—a displacement of the final vocabulary Zornberg associates with Joseph in favor of "a new vocabulary of intimate relationship." Judah's speech does not argue for any theoretical or moral propositions. It contains no new information beyond what has already been recounted in the narrative and does not develop any kind of logical argument in its effort to persuade Joseph to spare their father Jacob the pain of losing another son. Zornberg reads into this a rejection of the

kind of final vocabulary that Joseph exemplifies in her reading, and she further infers from the near absence of any mention of God in the speech that Judah is rejecting any objective or transcendent perspective on the truth altogether.

What the speech does instead, using “the simple language of personal feeling,” is assert Judah’s own personal involvement in all that his family has experienced: “it is not his father’s anguish, or the family’s trouble that he is describing; it is his own pain of involvement and empathy” (*Genesis*, 330). Zornberg describes the speech as a “personal litany, a chain of words and images that have peculiar resonance for himself.” It is a kind of self-analysis, but it is more than mere introspection or self-reflection: she calls it a “project of self-creation” in which Judah draws on the events he experiences to form himself into a new kind of person. Zornberg evokes the language of the rope again at this point in her exposition, but this time she uses it as a metaphor for the ways in which Judah has come to understand that his life is painfully twisted up with the lives of his father and brothers. The speech is not merely describing this new insight; its articulation in words is the very moment at which this new truth about Judah is being constituted. The Judah who emerges through the speech can see Jacob’s grief as Jacob himself sees it because he has “described himself in a new vocabulary that suggests what it is like to see the other seeing” (*Genesis*, 330). Zornberg’s use of the language of redescription is indexing a Rortean ideal of the Self as one that recognizes it has the power to transform itself through language.

Does this reading correspond in any way to what the author of Gen 44 intended in composing the speech? To ask such a question misses what Zornberg is suggesting: the speech does not have a meaning independent of that which people invest in it through language, and her reading, a redescription of the speech that turns it into an exemplum of redescription, is true by exactly the same pragmatic measure of the truth that she is using Judah’s speech to articulate, a personal truth grounded in the particulars, contingencies, and pain of one’s own life experience and expressing itself in a vocabulary of intimate relationship.

What made it possible for Judah to embrace this ironic perspective is something that Zornberg addresses in an earlier part of the chapter that we have not touched on here (*Genesis*, 325–29). We cannot do that part of the chapter justice within this context, but I would note two key developments in Judah’s personality that lay the groundwork for the speech. The first is Judah’s experience of vulnerability as a parent. Before he had

children of his own, Judah could not understand his father's perspective, but Judah's own losses as a parent initiate him into a fellowship of pain that expands his consciousness of others' pain. The second is what Judah learns from his encounter with Tamar, his daughter-in-law, in a midrashically expanded version of Gen 37. Suffice it to say for now that he learns from her what it takes to truly to see another—a different, nonliteral kind of seeing than the one that Joseph has pursued that comes from internalizing a sense of responsibility to another, what Emmanuel Levinas called a "direct optics."¹⁰ While Judah's life experiences deepen the sense of vulnerability, empathy, and ethical responsibility that make it possible to deliver the kind of speech he makes to Joseph, however, it takes the speech itself to accomplish the transformation: to become another person, Judah has to find the words to describe himself as another person.

In light of all this, let us turn back to the question driving this essay: In what sense does Judah as Zornberg imagines him offer a solution to the problem of other minds? We have seen that Zornberg questions psychoanalysis as a way into other minds despite the various ways in which she draws on it. How does Judah and the various ideas that Zornberg inscribes into the story of his speech to Joseph—the Rortean rejection of final vocabularies, the self-transforming power of redescription—work as an alternative way to address this problem?

Judah is no more capable of clairvoyance than you or I; he cannot literally see as his father sees, but he can imagine and describe himself as seeing as his father sees, and that approximation is what allows him to bridge the divide between himself and others, however imperfectly. Zornberg describes the kind of knowledge generated in this way as a "plausible construction of reality" (*Genesis*, 344). It is not the clear and absolutely reliable knowledge that Joseph aspires to; it is but a construction—a conjecture or hypothesis about the other that is never incontrovertible and does not offer the mastery of others' secrets that psychoanalysis would seem to promise. But it is "good enough" in Zornberg's view, not a final vocabulary but a self-consciously provisional one that brings us as close as humanly possible to seeing the world from within another's point of view.

A kind of epilogue at the end of the chapter offers a bit more information about the kind of cognition involved, now personified by Zornberg

10. Zornberg, *Genesis*, 330, citing Emmanuel Levinas. *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 47.

in the form of Judah's father Jacob. For much of his life, Jacob was similar to Joseph in his need for ocular proof; his sons manipulated that impulse to their advantage by using a piece of ocular proof, Joseph's robe, which they had soaked in a goat's blood to convince him that Joseph has been eaten by a wild animal (Gen 37:31–34). But by the end of his life, Jacob, too, has learned to see in a different way, almost completely blind yet able to recognize the face of Joseph and distinguish between Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Rashi attributes this strange new form of sight to divine inspiration, but Zornberg's discussion suggests a cognitive explanation: Jacob's vision is also a "plausible construction," filling in the gaps of sense experience with input gleaned from what Jacob hears from his sons and the experience of what he is feeling now in a way that allows him to form an approximation of what he cannot see, an inner-vision of Joseph's face and of his grandchildren's future. This kind of constructed perception is what makes it possible to see as another person sees, according to Zornberg, and it is true not in an objective sense but in the pragmatic one, because it *works* to bridge between minds.

Turning back to Judah, we find that his life experiences have taught him how to construct this kind of perception, but we also learn from his speech that one does not have to personally live through all the experiences he has suffered to be able to develop the cognitive ability he has developed. The speech also works to impart it to another who absorbs its lessons and is transformed by what he hears: Joseph learns from it that his belief that he can bypass the treachery of words and secure privileged access to the truth within others has been wrong-headed, and he not only abandons the investigation he has been conducting but begins to emulate Judah by undertaking a similar redescription of himself. Judah's speech is not simply an act of self-creation; it overcomes the psychoanalytic rationality personified by Joseph, displacing its empiricism with the ironic sensibility. I cannot but think that what Zornberg is describing here is a projection of her own rhetorical project, the impact of Judah's speech on Joseph mirroring the transformation she herself is trying to draw out of her readers through her own redescriptive practice.

Consider what Judah's speech shares with Zornberg's biblical commentary. To begin with, as she makes clear in this chapter, she herself is an ironist: "The project of knowing oneself or other human beings is so complex and entangled that an empirical rationality, a search for a 'final vocabulary,' will not do" (*Genesis*, 343). For Zornberg, empirical rationality, which includes psychoanalysis in its role as a science devoted to

making visible hidden truths, will not do as a way to pursue the project of knowing oneself or others. The only way to achieve such knowledge is through redescription in the “vocabulary of intimate relationship,” to cite a phrase that Zornberg uses to describe Judah’s speech, and that is what we have in Zornberg’s biblical commentaries: redescrptions that infuse the biblical past with personal experience and pain, a heightened sense of moral responsibility, and imaginatively reconstructed perspective taking. In another work, a commentary on the book of Exodus entitled the *Particulars of Rapture*, Zornberg describes the Oral Torah as “the Torah of infinite redescription,” another Rortian-inspired formulation that implies that the midrash she draws on as a source for her interpretations was meant from the beginning to give Israel an inexhaustible vocabulary by which to re-create itself.¹¹ Zornberg seems to understand her work as a continuation of Oral Torah in this sense, and she distills her project in miniature in the form of Judah’s speech.

I noted at the beginning of the essay that Zornberg understands the Torah not as an object in the world but as a construction of the reader, not a truth to be discovered by revealing secrets hidden behind the words of the visible text but a creation of the reader’s imagination. We are now in a position to appreciate that this is more than a rationale for interpretive playfulness but is tied to her Rortian orientation. Zornberg believes the truth of a self is created, not found in the world out there, and by performing an imaginative redescription of the biblical past she is modeling for her readers a way to make a new reality for themselves, to become a different person, just as Judah and Joseph do through their acts of self-redescription.

But Zornberg’s project is not only about self-fashioning. As I have been trying to argue, she is also seeking to address the problem of other minds, the problem of how to overcome the perceptual, linguistic, and empathic limits that make it so difficult for one human to connect to other. The solution she suggests is *not* psychoanalysis. To be sure, she relies on it for her understanding of the mind, but I have come to appreciate, given her resistance to all final vocabularies, that psychoanalysis is important for her not as a way to *know* what lies in the minds of others in an objective sense but as another vocabulary by which to re-create the self. What Zornberg offers as a way to read other minds is not psychology;

11. Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 392.

it is midrash as a model for how to imaginatively fill in the blanks in one's knowledge of others.

Reading Beyond What the Eyes Can See

None of this explanation may be enough to persuade a critically minded biblical scholar to pay attention to Zornberg's work, but as one final attempt to bridge the difference of perspective, let me offer a brief re-description of my own, translating Zornberg's approach into the vocabulary of empirical research.

What Zornberg describes in her retelling of the Joseph story calls to mind what psychologists and cognitive sciences have discovered by studying everyday mind reading. The concept of everyday mind reading arises from the observation that, faced with other minds that are inaccessible or opaque to them, people bring to bear a cognitive skill or set of skills that allows them to explain to themselves what is going on inside their heads. Some scholars refer to this understanding of other minds as "folk psychology," but it is more commonly referred to now as "theory of mind," theory not in the sense of an academic theory but referring to a nonconscious understanding of how other minds work that people develop as children to explain and predict the actions of others. Much research has been invested in figuring out how people construct theory of mind—whether early in life we instinctively gather information from observation of subtle behaviors such as how people direct their gaze or whether we generate simulations of others minds based on nonconscious introspection of our own minds, but we do not have the space to get into that.¹² My point is that this process corresponds to the enhanced perception Zornberg describes: the mind's ability to "see" into other minds through modes of thought developed precisely in order to reach beyond what the eyes can reveal.

Some psychologists believe that it is possible to keep developing one's theory of mind into adulthood, through training and practice, and few years ago, in 2013, a study was published that suggested that reading could function in that way by honing relevant interpretive skills.¹³ Not just any

12. For an overview of the research, see Robert Gordon, "Folk Psychology as Mental Stimulation," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), <https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress4706e1>.

13. Emanuele Castano and David Kidd, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," *Science* 342 (2013): 377–80.

kind of reading has this effect; the benefit seemed to kick in only by reading works of high-quality fiction, works that depicted characters whose thinking and motives were opaque or ambiguous. The study has been subject to criticism,¹⁴ and I would not stake the argument I am offering in favor of Zornberg's approach on whether it can be shown to improve theory of mind. The research does not at this point offer a way to pursue such a possibility—and in any case, to defer to it as an arbiter of the truth would run afoul of her critique of empirical rationality. But for those who think as Joseph does (before he learns from Judah to think in a different way), such work does offer a scientifically supported reason to consider her approach as a source of insight, albeit a different kind of insight than what academic biblical scholars normally seek.

Theory of mind research has uncovered a mode of cognition that aims to see beyond the limits of the eyes, a skill, or skills that might be cultivatable through reading, and Zornberg has arrived at a compatible understanding of the mind and how to use reading to develop it. What she sees in the Torah in this way is invisible to critical eyes, but that does not mean that it is not true; in her conception of the truth, it is as real as the hidden thoughts of others.¹⁵

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14. See Maria Panero, Jessica Black, and Jennifer Barns, "No Support for the Claim That Reading Literary Fiction Uniquely and Immediately Improves Theory of Mind," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 112 (2017): e5–e8, but note also Iris van Kuijk, Peter Verkoeijen, Katinka Dijkstra, and Rolf Zwaan. "The Effect of Reading a Short Literary Passage on Theory of Mind: a Replication of Kidd and Castano (2013)," *Collabra* (2018), <http://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.117>.

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